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Allegiances

SHADOWCLAN

Leader: Depthstar - Very dark blue-gray tom with a lighter front left paw, dark blue eyes.

Deputy: Cobratail - Mottled dark red and black tabby tom with amber eyes.

Medicine Cat: Hawkfeather - Spotted brown tabby tom with yellow eyes.
Apprentice, Dewstorm

Warriors

Crowmask - Black tom with amber eyes.

Greenpine - Brown tabby she-cat with green eyes.

Ashcloud - Dark gray and white tom with pale green eyes.

Rosebreeze - Creamy ginger tabby she-cat with pale amber eyes.

Cougarfoot - Golden brown tom with a white muzzle, black ear tips and tail tip, amber eyes.
Apprentice, Revengepaw

Cliffshade - Dark brown and gray tom with a white underbelly, yellow eyes.

Poisonedsap - Dark golden brown she-cat with dark brown muzzle, throat, nose blaze, black chin, ears, paws, and tail tip, amber eyes.

Flameheart - Ginger tabby tom with green eyes.

Copperstripe - Dark golden ginger tabby tom with amber eyes.

Timberstorm - Dark brown tabby tom with yellow eyes.

Apprentice, Swiftpaw

Blackstorm - Black tom with yellow eyes.

Brownstripe - Brown tabby tom with yellow eyes.

Foxshadow - Black and very dark ginger tom with a bushy tail, dark amber eyes.

Stripednose - Tortoiseshell tom with white paws, chest, and muzzle, black mark on his nose, blue eyes.

Mottledface - Mottled brown tom with amber eyes.

Boost - Brown tabby tom with yellow eyes. Former loner.

Song - White she-cat with light blue eyes. Former loner.

Apprentices

Dewstorm - Spotted gray tom with yellow eyes. The medicine cat apprentice.

Revengepaw- White tom with jet black legs, yellow eyes.

Swiftpaw- Black and white tom with blue eyes.

Queens

Bloomfire - Orange she-cat with white paws, muzzle, and chin, dark ginger ears. Mother to Flameheart's kit:

Bloodkit - Dark reddish brown tabby tom with a nick in his right ear, yellow eyes.

Diamondrain - Silver gray she-cat with darker spots, paws, and ears, white chest, muzzle, and chin, light blue eyes. Mother to Crowmask's kits:

Mistykit - Silver-gray she-cat with darker points, light blue eyes.

Coldkit - Dark gray tom with darker points, dark blue eyes.

Elders

Buzzardglare- Dark brown tabby tom with one blind eye, yellow eyes.

Foxshine - Ginger she-cat with yellow eyes.

Carrottail - Orange tabby tom with yellow eyes.

Bluerain - Light blue gray speckled she-cat with blue eyes.

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THUNDERCLAN

Leader: Strawberrystar - Speckled reddish-ginger and cream she-cat with amber eyes.

Deputy: Snowfalcon - Broad shouldered white tom with amber eyes.
Apprentice, Darkpaw

Medicine Cat: Spicewhisker - Small black tom with a white muzzle, tail tip, and front right paw, yellow eyes.

Warriors

Broadwing - Broad shouldered dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes.
Apprentice, Batpaw

Oaktuft - Brown and cream tabby tom with amber eyes.

Morningmist - Light gray tabby she-cat with light blue eyes.

Chillwhisker - Light gray tabby tom with light blue eyes.

Hickoryroot - Brown tabby tom with amber eyes.

Cedarnose - Dark brown tabby tom with a white splashed muzzle and paws, amber eyes.

Vanillafern - Creamy colored tabby she-cat with pale yellow eyes.

Apprentices

Batpaw - Smoky black tom with gray-brown muzzle and underbelly, amber eyes.

Darkpaw - Very dark brown tom with swirled black stripes, amber eyes.

WINDCLAN

Leader: Gladestar - Light golden yellow tabby she-cat with pale greenish yellow eyes.

Deputy: Monarchwing - Orange she-cat with black spots and ear tips, golden yellow muzzle, chin, nose blaze, chest, and tail tip, darker orange paws, yellowish green eyes.

Medicine Cat: Silverberry - Silver she-cat with a darker front left paw, tail tip, and right ear, green eyes.

Apprentice, Starfaith

Warriors:

Featherblaze -Pale ginger tabby she-cat with a white chest, amber eyes.

Apprentice, Sharppaw

Darkstorm - Black tom with green eyes.

Thunderjolt - Broad shouldered black and white tom with silver stripes and amber eyes.

Firetail - Orange tom with a red tail and ears, yellow eyes.

Soakedears - Very dark gray tom with black ears and paws, dark green eyes.

Apprentice, Scorchpaw

Jaggedear - Brown tabby tom with a torn left ear, green eyes.

Apprentice, Tornadopaw

Jaystreak - Blue-gray and black tom with a white stripe across each side, blue eyes.

Driftrunner- Dark golden brown tom with very thick black classic tabby stripes, muzzle, chin, ears, paws, chest, and underbelly, amber eyes.

Howlstorm - Dark gray tom with green eyes.

Dandeliontail - Yellow tabby and white she-cat with yellow eyes.

Whitehare - White tom with light green eyes.

Blazinglight - Golden yellow tom with yellow eyes.

Petalflame - Yellow, orange, and white she-cat with yellow eyes.

Apprentices

Starfaith - Golden yellow she-cat with a yellow tail tip and star shape on chest, yellow eyes.

Tornadopaw - Dark gray tabby tom with yellow eyes.

Scorchpaw - Dark tortoiseshell tom that is mostly black with small ginger splotches, amber eyes.

Sharppaw - Thin black tom with green-yellow eyes.

Queens

Willowtail- Light gray tabby she-cat with blue eyes. Mother to Icetail's kit:

Thistlekit - White tom with a gray tabby head and tail, light blue eyes.

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Clovernose - Brown and white she-cat with green eyes. Mother to Thunderjolt's kits:

Leopardkit - Brown she-cat with black spots, paws, chin, ears, tail tip, amber eyes.

Marshkit - Smoky black and tan tom with green eyes.

Elders

Whitefrost - White she-cat with blue eyes.

Cornwhisker - Golden tabby and white tom with yellow eyes.

Wetbelly - Dark gray tabby tom with a black underbelly, blue eyes.

RIVERCLAN

Leader: Frostedstar - White tom with pale blue eyes.

Deputy: Ravenfeather - Black tom with amber eyes.

Medicine cat: Otterpelt - Red-brown she-cat with amber eyes.

Apprentice, Sagepaw

Warriors

Petalfin - Silver, dark gray, black, and white splashed she-cat with blue eyes.

Dipfoot - Gray tom with silver paws, blue eyes.

Cherryberry - Red and ginger she-cat with amber eyes.

Winterlight - Long furred dark gray and pale yellow she-cat with yellow eyes.

Duckwing - Dark brown tabby tom with sea green eyes.

Warmmoss - Light brown and white she-cat with pale green-yellow eyes.

Heartsong - Silver and white she-cat with black ears and tail, blue

eyes.

Darkminnow - Sleek black tom with dark teal eyes.

Mintfrost - White tom with small silver tabby patches, green eyes.

Arcticblaze - Small white tom with ice blue eyes.

Dovewhisper- Pale silver and white tabby she-cat with pale green eyes.

Thunderwater - Dark gray and black tabby tom with dark blue eyes.

Frostleaf - Mottled pale brown and white speckled tom with a white face and legs, blue eyes.

Tansytail - Light golden brown tabby she-cat with green eyes.

Apprentices

Sagepaw - Silver and black tabby she-cat with pale blue-green eyes. The medicine cat apprentice.

Queens

Risingmoon - White she-cat with dark gray and silver tabby points, blue eyes. Mother to Darkminnow's kit:

Cloudkit - Small black tom with white toes and heart shape on chest, light blue eyes.

Elders

Mudslip - Brown tom with darker ears, tail tip, and paws, black muzzle, green eyes.

Swanpool - Slender white she-cat with black tail tip, ears, muzzle, and toes, ice blue eyes.

SKYCLAN

Leader: Ravenstar - Long furred black tom with green eyes.

Deputy: Sandblaze - Light golden yellow tom with light brown-ginger paws, mark on chest, ears, chin, and yellowish blaze on forehead and tail tip. Yellow eyes.

Medicine Cat: Ryeheart - Brown tabby tom with dark brown tabby legs, tail, ears, and nose blaze, creamy chin, muzzle, chest, and tail tip, amber eyes.

Warriors

Tigerleap - Dark golden brown tabby tom with amber eyes.

Brackenleaf - Dark ginger tabby tom with amber eyes.

Deserve's Army

Leader: Deserve - Black tom with white paws, emerald green eyes.

Healers

Shimmer - Silver spotted tabby she-cat, pale amber eyes.

Coco - Dark brown tabby she-cat, green eyes.

Soldiers

Castiel - Silver tabby tom with light blue eyes.

Crow - Black tom with a white front left paw, amber eyes.

Papercut - Thin white tom with a scar down the center of his face, pale yellow eyes.

Wolf - Very thick furred dark brown-gray tom with a white muzzle, yellow eyes.

Bonfire - Fiery ginger tom with black patches, amber eyes.

Sunset - Ginger tabby she-cat with yellow eyes.

Sorrel - Orange tabby she-cat with darker ginger ears and tail, pale green eyes.

Timber - Brown tabby tom with a torn ear, green eyes.

Patch - White tom with brown patches, blue eyes.

Coke - Black tom with dark gray spotted legs, dark blue eyes.

Screech - Black tom with amber eyes.

Queens

Ivy - Dark brown tabby she-cat with white patches, green eyes. Mother to Wolf's kits:

Talon - Dark gray-brown tom, yellow eyes.

Snowflake - silver she-cat with white spots, pale blue eyes.

Misty - Dark gray tabby she-cat, pale green eyes.

Chapter 1

"Your eyes are so blue!"

Mistykit twitched her ear at her brother's squeak. *His eyes must have opened!* She realized with a pang of envy.

She heard her mother purr softly in response to Coldkit. "So are yours, little one."

Will mine open too soon? Do I have blue eyes like Coldkit and Diamondrain? She wondered, shifting against her mother's warm belly. As long as she could remember, she could see nothing but darkness. Though it had been only a matter of days, it felt like forever to a kit who had yet to see the world. She constantly wondered what the nursery looked like, and her denmates who she only knew by the sound of their voices.

"Will Mistykit's eyes open soon too?" That was Bloodkit, not far from her.

His mother, Bloomfire, sounded further away from them. "I'm sure it won't be much longer. It depends if she's ready." She purred.

Maybe I am ready... Mistykit's stomach fluttered with excitement. She stumbled up into a sitting position and felt her mother's tailtip brush against her flank.

"It looks like she's ready now," Diamondrain murmured warmly. "Go on dear. The world is waiting for you. There's so much to see!"

The world is waiting for me. The thought made her fur tingle with excitement. *I can't wait to see it all!* She sensed another cat in front of her as she slowly opened her eyes.

The dark veil parted, revealing the furry red face of another kit. *Is that Bloodkit?* She recalled how close his voice had sounded just moments ago. *It must be!* She found herself taken back by his bright

yellow eyes which were fixed happily on her. *Wow...! I've never seen colors before. But this one is already my favorite!* She was unable to look away, her eyes stretching wider as she stared into their golden depths. "Wow!" She breathed in awe.

Bloodkit's eyes flashed with unease, and his ears flicked back self consciously. "W-what is it?"

"Your eyes!" Mistykit squeaked and leaned toward him, not taking her eyes off his. Unable to resist getting a closer look, she pressed forward until their noses were touching, her gaze locked on his yellow eyes. "They're like the sun!" She mewed in amazement.

He let out a purr of amusement and leaned back a little. "You don't even know what the sun looks like!"

That was true. But the nursery queens spoke of the sun now and then, and Mistykit felt that only the bright glow of Bloodkit's eyes could match it. "Now I do!" She replied happily. "Like *that!"*

While Bloodkit turned away in embarrassment, a dark gray and black kit bounced in front of her. "Your eyes are open!" He exclaimed. "Look Diamondrain, she has blue eyes too!"

"I do?" She gasped and stared at the kit she immediately identified as Coldkit. She stared at his deep blue eyes for a moment. *So that's blue... That's what my eyes look like!*

She felt Diamondrain's soft tongue rasp over her head, and she quickly turned to look up at her mother for the first time. She had a beautiful silver spotted coat and blue eyes, however they were lighter than Coldkit's. Her mother gazed down at her warmly and let out a purr. "Hello, little one."

"You're so pretty!" Mistykit immediately looked down at her paws, discovering that they were both silver. "I look a lot like you, don't I?"

"Yes, you do." Diamondrain lowered her head to nuzzle her. "Only you have less spots."

Mistykit slowly turned in circles, trying to study her entire pelt.

Unlike her mother, spots were absent from her silver fur, and she felt strangely disappointed. *I like her spots!*

"Hi, Mistykit!"

She stopped spinning at the sound of the new voice and looked up to see who it belonged to. A black and white kit had scampered over, his blue eyes bright and friendly. "I'm Swiftkit! You and Coldkit are going to love seeing the camp and-"

"Swiftkit!"

A she-cat snapped sharply, and Mistykit jumped a little in surprise, instinctively pressing back against Diamondrain. Beyond Swiftkit lay a golden and brown queen with ragged fur. Her amber eyes were narrowed at him. "Come play with your brother," She growled. "Don't waste time with silly introductions!"

Swiftkit's black ears flattened. "Yes, Poisonedsap," He mumbled and reluctantly returned to his mother.

With her crouched another black and white kit, his amber eyes gleaming eagerly at Swiftkit. *That must be Stonekit.* His white tail swished back and forth before he pounced on his brother. Swiftkit let out a startled yelp, and Poisonedsap purred approvingly.

Mistykit tilted her head, troubled by their violent behavior. *They're different from Coldkit and Bloodkit...*

"Since our eyes are open, we can play now too!" She turned to see Coldkit pounce onto Bloodkit's back.

The older kit laughed and looked over his shoulder at him. "Yeah!"

"Be careful, Bloodkit," Bloomfire meowed worriedly. "They're much smaller than you."

"I will, don't worry," Bloodkit promised as Coldkit playfully nipped his ear. He lowered himself and gently nudged Coldkit off of him. "Here, let's play a game."

Mistykit climbed out of her nest and tilted her head. "A game?

Okay!" *I've never played a game before... But I bet it's fun!*

She and Coldkit watched curiously as Bloodkit crouched by Bloomfire's nest and pulled out a ball of moss in his teeth. He turned to the other kits and dropped it, rolling it under his paw.

"Swiftkit taught me this game," He meowed, casting a worried look at his friend as he grappled with Stonekit. "It's called mossball. I'm going to toss it to you, and you bat it back."

"That sounds fun!" Mistykit purred eagerly.

Beside her, Coldkit bounced excitedly. "Yeah, let's play!"

"Okay, you first Mistykit!" Bloodkit tossed the ball of moss in the air and lightly batted it toward her.

She froze for a moment before leaping forward, swinging her paw at it. To her dismay, she missed it completely and awkwardly fell onto her side. She heard Coldkit break into laughter and stumbled to her paws, her pelt hot with embarrassment.

She expected to see Bloodkit laughing at her too, but he wasn't. "Are you okay?" He asked in concern.

"Yeah." Mistykit shook out her fur. "Sorry, Bloodkit."

"It's okay!" He assured her, his yellow eyes warm. "It was great for a first try."

Coldkit's tail twitched impatiently as he stopped laughing. "Can I try?"

"Of course!"

As Bloodkit passed the mossball to Coldkit, she heard the queens purring behind them.

"It's wonderful that the kits have already become friends," Diamondrain was purring to Bloomfire.

The orange and white queen nodded as she gazed at the kits. "They

seem to get along very well."

"Bloodkit is our best friend!" Mistykit exclaimed, looking at the reddish brown kit brightly.

"Yeah!" Coldkit joined in happily. "I hope we play with you every day, so we can learn more games!"

Bloodkit looked taken back, his yellow eyes flashing with emotion. "O-of course!" He stammered, a purr rumbling in his throat. "I'll be the best friend I can be, I promise."

"I see you've made some new friends."

Mistykit turned to see a ginger tabby warrior step into the nursery, his green eyes fixed warmly on Bloodkit.

"Flameheart!" Bloodkit purred and hurried forward to meet him. The tom lowered his head to nuzzle him. Beyond them, Bloomfire watched them warmly.

That must be Bloodkit's father. Mistykit thought. An unanswered question crossed her mind, and she quickly turned to Diamondrain. "Where is our father?" She asked excitedly. "Who is he?"

"Yeah, which warrior is he?" Coldkit prompted. "I'll bet he's the best in the clan!"

Unease flashed across her mother's face. "Your father..." She hesitated for a long moment before responding. "Your father is Crowmask. He's a black tom with amber eyes."

Coldkit perked up. "That must be where my dark markings come from!"

"That's right." Diamondrain sounded uncomfortable.

Mistykit looked toward the exit of the nursery, trying to see the cats in the clearing. "Where is Crowmask? When is he coming to visit us?" She asked curiously.

"Come on, let's go find him and show him our eyes are open!"

Coldkit started toward the exit.

"No, no." Diamondrain blocked him with her tail, and he looked up at her, puzzled. "Crowmask... He's very busy with his duties," She murmured. "He'll visit when he has time."

"Oh, okay." Coldkit sat down, disappointed.

As Mistykit watched Flameheart let Bloodkit play with his tail, she grew more and more excited to meet her own father. *He must be a really great warrior if he's so busy. I hope we make him proud!*

When Flameheart left, Bloodkit returned to the kits. Mistykit eyed the moss ball on the ground between them. "Can we play some more? Please!"

The red tabby kit purred. "Sure!"

As the three of them continued their game, Mistykit realized that she'd never been happier. She wanted to stay in the nursery forever, playing games with Coldkit and Bloodkit. *The world is such a great place!* She thought happily. *Nothing will ever take this feeling away.*

***

As moons passed, Mistykit soon learned the unfortunate truth. Life couldn't be that simple and carefree. Change was inevitable. The leaves on the trees had turned golden and red, the air brisk and chilly as leaf-fall arrived. But this was the least significant of the changes she now faced.

"Catch, Mistykit!" Coldkit batted a moss-ball to her.

She leaped up and swat it back to him, letting out a purr. "I can catch anything!"

"Do you really think ThunderClan did it?" Rosebreeze, the newest nursery queen, quietly spoke behind them.

Diamondrain met the creamy tabby's gaze sympathetically. "It seems like it, Rosebreeze."

A couple moons ago, Maplefur had been found dead on ThunderClan territory. Just a day later, he and Poisonedsap's kits were apprenticed. While Swiftkit became Swiftpaw, Stonekit changed his name to Revengepaw. It was an unusual name, but the young tom had insisted taking it on in regard to his desire to avenge Maplefur's death.

Not long after Maplefur's death, another warrior, Milkblaze, was found dead. The clan agreed that only ThunderClan could be responsible, and every warrior and apprentice was preparing for battle.

"But why...?" Rosebreeze's voice cracked. "Why Maplefur and Milkblaze...?"

Mistykit remembered that the murdered warriors were Rosebreeze's brothers. Losing them had taken a great toll on her, and every cat knew she was still grieving deeply. Mistykit was hardly aware of the moss ball flying over her head as she stared at Rosebreeze sadly.

"Maplefur loved kits," The queen rasped. "He should be here to see mine. Milkblaze too..."

Diamondrain rested her paw over Rosebreeze's, her blue eyes filled with sorrow. "They're with StarClan now," She murmured.

"Yes, and they'll watch over the kits, won't they?" Mistykit realized a moment later that she shouldn't have interrupted. *This is a serious moment! A kit like me has no right to speak here!*

But the grieving queen looked at her and let out a dry purr. "You're right, Mistykit. Thank you." Beside her, Diamondrain's eyes shone with pride.

The leaves by the entrance rustled as Brownstripe ducked into the den, a mouse in his jaws. He lowered his head and dropped it in front of Rosebreeze. "I thought you might be hungry," He purred.

Rosebreeze turned her head to her mate and purred. "Thank you, Brownstripe." Her voice cracked as she spoke.

The brown tabby noticed, and his eyes flashed with worry.

"Rosebreeze? Are you alright?" When she didn't respond, he glanced questioningly at Diamondrain. The queen met his gaze, and he seemed to understand immediately.

Brownstripe crouched and pressed his head against Rosebreeze's. "It's alright," He murmured. "I'm here. Think of how amazing our kits will be. Maplefur and Milkblaze would want you to focus on them."

The creamy tabby let out a purr and leaned back to lick his head. "You're going to be a great father."

Mistykit already envied Rosebreeze's future kits for having a father like Brownstripe. For moons, she and Coldkit waited for Crowmask to visit them. He never did. While playing outside the nursery, they sometimes saw him in the clearing, eating prey or getting ready to go on patrol. But whenever Crowmask caught their eye, he'd quickly turn away. Mistykit and Coldkit soon understood that their father wanted nothing to do with them, for reasons Diamondrain never told them. She only promised that it wasn't their fault.

She and Coldkit were no longer hurt by Crowmask's absence in their lives. Though Mistykit often wondered what it was like to have two parents, Diamondrain gave them enough love and care for two cats. Perhaps one was all they needed.

"I just had a training session with Bloodpaw," Brownstripe meowed to Rosebreeze.

Mistykit looked up at the mention of her former denmate. Bloodpaw had begun his apprenticeship shortly after Swiftpaw and Revengepaw. Though he had promised to visit Mistykit and Coldkit often, he rarely did. She assumed he was busy with his training and tried not to be hurt by this.

"Bloodpaw!" Coldkit perked up. "Is he back in camp?"

Mistykit bounded out of the nursery. "Let's find out!" She exclaimed. Coldkit joined her, and they surveyed the clearing hopefully.

She spotted Bloodpaw at the side of the clearing, practicing battle

moves with Swiftpaw. "Bloodpaw! Bloodpaw!" She and Coldkit hurried across the clearing.

The red tabby apprentice paused and turned to them, his eyes lighting with warmth. "Hey!"

As she and Coldkit tackled him, Swiftpaw watched in amusement, shaking his head. "I sure hope there aren't any kits in the battle tomorrow, or you'll never make it."

"We won't be kits for much longer," Coldkit pointed out as he jumped off of Bloodpaw, his chin high. "We'll be apprenticed in one moon!"

Mistykit looked at Bloodpaw eagerly as he got to his paws. "How's your training going? Are you learning a lot? What's the territory like?"

Bloodpaw let out a purr. "It's great! I-"

"Bloodpaw!"

They turned to see a golden warrior, Cougarfoot, approaching. "Me and Swiftpaw are going to review a few moves once more before the battle. I'd like you to come." He glanced across the clearing as Brownstripe stepped out of the nursery. "I want to make sure you've been properly prepared."

The tabby warrior narrowed his eyes at Cougarfoot, flicking his tail before padding away. Bloodpaw stared after his mentor for a moment, then turned to Cougarfoot. "Okay."

"Wait!" Coldkit called out in disappointment as the three cats began padding away. "Will you play with us after?"

Cougarfoot paused and glanced over his shoulder. "Tomorrow we'll be attacking the ThunderClan camp," He reminded them. "Bloodpaw needs to focus on his training."

"Okay..." Mistykit's tail drooped. Of course, this was much more important. But she and Coldkit missed spending time with Bloodpaw.

As Cougarfoot and Swiftpaw continued toward the thorn tunnel, Bloodpaw hesitated, turning to face Mistykit and Coldkit. "I'm sorry. Things are just hard now because I'm an apprentice." His yellow eyes warmed. "But it'll all change soon. Once you're apprentices, we can spend lots of time training and hanging out."

"I can't wait!" Mistykit purred. As Bloodpaw hurried after Cougarfoot and Swiftpaw, she and Coldkit ran back to the nursery.

He's right. Mistykit thought happily. She imagined the three of them training together in the forest, exchanging stories and staying up late at night in the apprentices den. *It would be so much fun! Once we're all apprentices, it'll be just like old times!*

Chapter 2

Mistykit awoke to sunlight leaking through the roof of the nursery. She blinked opened her eyes and rose to sit back on her haunches as her heartbeat quickened in alarm. "The sun has risen!" She gasped out.

She felt Coldkit stir against her. "What?" He yawned. "Did everyone leave already?"

"Most of the warriors and apprentices left a while ago." Rosebreeze meowed from where she lay in her nest, gently grooming her swollen stomach.

As Mistykit's heart sunk in disappointment, Coldkit sat up sharply, sounding more alert. "What? We missed them? I wanted to wish Bloodpaw good luck!"

"Me too," She mewed quietly, looking out into the empty clearing. *I hoped he'd at least say goodbye...*

Behind them, Diamondrain blinked sympathetically. "I'm sure he just didn't want to wake you," She told them. "Don't worry. They'll tell us all about the battle when they return."

I hope no cat gets hurt. Mistykit thought worriedly. *Revengepaw and Swiftpaw fought fiercely enough as kits... But a fight between grown warriors...* She imagined her clanmates returning with horrible wounds, leaving trails of blood behind them. She shuddered and tried to push the gruesome thought away.

"Good morning." Dewstorm chirped a greeting as he padded into the nursery, sunlight dappling his gray spotted coat. "Rosebreeze, how are you feeling today?" He crouched beside her and sniffed her plump belly fur. "Your kits are due any day now."

"I'm alright." The cream tabby queen hesitated. "Worried about what will come of the battle, but I'm sure every cat is."

The medicine cat gave a small nod of agreement. "I can't imagine why Strawberrystar would allow her warriors to kill," He said quietly. "But I think an attack is justified if it means avenging Maplefur and Milkblaze."

"Yes." Rosebreeze's eyes clouded with sorrow.

Coldkit tensed. "If ThunderClan warriors were willing to kill before, they're sure to do it in a battle!"

He exchanged an anxious look with Mistykit, whose blood turned cold with dread. *He's right! What if more cats die?* The vision of her bloodied clanmates returned, this time accompanied by those carrying dead bodies. *What if Bloodpaw is among them?* She feared. *Or Revengepaw and Swiftpaw? Or Crowmask?*

While Diamondrain lowered her head to give Coldkit a comforting lick on the ear, Mistykit looked up at Dewstorm anxiously. "Do you think anyone will die today? StarClan would have told you, wouldn't they?"

Dewstorm wasn't just the clan medicine cat apprentice. He was Diamondrain's brother, and therefore Mistykit's kin. She admired his skill and intelligence that few cats in the forest shared. He visited the nursery often to check on the queens, but Mistykit didn't need a connection with StarClan to know that he loved visiting his niece and nephew.

The medicine cat's eyes grew soft with warmth. "StarClan doesn't tell me everything, Mistykit. I wish they did." He crouched and touched his nose to her head. "But it's against the warrior code to kill in battle. ThunderClan follows the same code we do."

Then why would they kill Maplefur and Milkblaze..? Mistykit questioned, but decided not to voice her thoughts. *I don't want to think about death anymore. I'd rather believe that Dewstorm is right.*

"Dewstorm!"

Mistykit flicked an ear in the direction of the sound and turned to see Hawkfeather standing outside the den, his tail swishing

impatiently. "I need you to help me mix herbs. There will be injuries to treat when the warriors return."

"Right." Dewstorm rose to his paws. "Rosebreeze, let us know if you need anything."

Rosebreeze purred quietly. "Of course. Thank you, Dewstorm."

Diamondrain nodded to her brother as he exited the den to meet Hawkfeather. As the medicine cats spoke quietly outside, Coldkit turned to Mistykit. "Let's play a game," He suggested, his eyes gleaming playfully. "I'll be a big mean ThunderClan cat, and you can be a fierce ShadowClan warrior!"

Mistykit was about to tell him how wrong that felt given the situation when distant meowing and yowls of triumph outside caught her attention.

As she and Coldkit looked in its direction, Diamondrain's ears pricked forward. "They're back!" Mistykit and Coldkit hurried out of the nursery while behind them, Diamondrain rose and followed more slowly. Rosebreeze stayed in her nest, though her eyes were filled with curiosity.

Mistykit sat beside Coldkit outside the nursery, watching anxiously as her clanmates streamed through the thorn tunnel and into the clearing. Depthstar and Cobratail led the group, speaking together, but their voices were drowned out by the cheering warriors behind them.

"We won!" Copperstripe announced, his tail high and his amber eyes lit with triumph.

Beside him, Cliffshade gave a satisfied nod. "We taught ThunderClan a lesson, not to mess with our warriors." As Greenpine padded to his side, he hesitated, twitching his ear. "You fought well," He commented.

The tabby she-cat glanced at him, mildly surprised. "Well, you weren't so bad yourself, flea-pelt." She purred and nudged him.

"Hawkfeather!"

Mistykit tensed when she saw Boost limp into camp, flanked by Stripednose and Song. Blood streaked the fur around a long gash in his shoulder. *Oh no!*

"Hawkfeather, Boost is hurt!" Song gasped, staring at her brother anxiously.

The tabby medicine cat hurried over and sniffed at the young warrior's wound. "Don't worry, it's nothing serious," He meowed as he began applying cobwebs with his paws.

Mistykit slowly relaxed as she realized there were no serious wounds, and the clan wouldn't be so triumphant if a clanmate had been killed. She brightened when she saw Bloodpaw at the side of the clearing near Bloomfire and Flameheart.

"Look, there's Bloodpaw!" She gasped and raced forward, feeling her brother hard on her paws. She dodged the clusters of celebrating warriors and slowed when she neared him. Coldkit skidded to a halt beside her. "Hey!"

They looked up expectantly at Bloodpaw, but he seemed to take no notice of them, his yellow eyes staring across the clearing where some other cats were gathered.

"Bloodpaw? Are you alright?" Mistykit prompted worriedly, tilting her head. *Is he hurt?*

"What?" Bloodpaw blinked, seeming to break out of his thoughts as he noticed them. "Oh, yeah. I'm fine." He sounded troubled and distant.

Something's bothering him. Mistykit was about to question him further when Depthstar's yowl interrupted. She turned to see the clan leader standing on the meeting rock, his blueish black fur pale under the morning light. Most of the clan was already gathered below, but settled and quieted as they turned their attention to their leader.

"Cats of ShadowClan, we are victorious!" As Depthstar began speaking, the clan cheered, and Mistykit and Coldkit awkwardly left

Bloodpaw's side to return to Diamondrain. They sat near their mother and looked up at the clan leader as he went on.

"The attack on ThunderClan was a success. We return with only minor injuries, and without a doubt, we have shown that we will not tolerate murder." Depthstar hesitated for a long moment, exchanging a glance with Cobratail, who sat on a rock below him. "However during the battle, one of ThunderClan's warriors, Hickoryroot, was killed."

As the cats below exchanged troubled looks and murmured quietly to one another, Mistykit's eyes widened. *What? That means a ShadowClan cat killed him!* Beside her, Coldkit inhaled sharply.

"With all due respect, Depthstar, they killed two of our own." Foxshadow spoke up from the side of the clearing, narrowing his amber eyes. "They deserved a loss."

While Blackstorm and Mottledface murmured agreement, Stripednose shot his brother a startled look. "How can you say that? It's against the warrior code to kill in battle!"

"They killed outside of battle!" Mottledface shot back, echoing Mistykit's earlier thoughts. "They broke the code long before we did."

"That's enough!" Depthstar growled, and the brothers quieted. "You are right that ThunderClan broke the code by killing two cats. But we are no better if we follow in their pawsteps. Hickoryroot was a warrior in the eyes of StarClan with a family who will mourn him, just as Maplefur and Milkblaze were."

As he spoke, Mistykit glanced over her shoulder into the nursery at Rosebreeze, who dropped her gaze at the mention of her lost brothers.

"I'd like to know who killed him," Depthstar meowed, and the cats below fell silent with unease. "Not because I'm punishing any cat, but because I'd like them to understand the mistake they've made."

He was answered by silence. Several cats exchanged troubled looks,

wondering which of their clanmates was guilty of the gruesome crime.

As the silence went on, Depthstar twitched his tail. "Did any cat see what happened?" He pressed.

Mistykit noticed Bloodpaw looking uncomfortable, shuffling his paws. He cast a glance at the side of the clearing, and she followed his gaze. Revengepaw sat in the shadows, his eyes narrowing at Bloodpaw as he caught his eye. Beside him, Swiftpaw looked at his brother nervously.

They must know something. She realized. *But why won't they speak up?* She stared at Bloodpaw, silently urging him to share what he knew.

"I saw what happened, Depthstar." Poisonedsap slowly rose to her paws, and every cat turned sharply to see her. Revengepaw looked startled, and Bloodpaw's eyes widened.

"Of course she did it!" Crowmask snorted from the front of the crowd. "No cat should be surprised. She was one of Bone Shred's rogues. Let's exile her right now and-"

"That's enough!" Depthstar snapped, and the black warrior reluctantly fell silent, lashing his tail. "We will hear her out." He gave the she-cat a nod. "Go on, Poisonedsap."

The golden she-cat dipped her head. "Thank you, Depthstar." She slowly padded forward, and the cats parted to create a path as she made her way toward the meeting rock. She raised her head to the clan leader, a solemn look on her face. "During the battle, Hickoryroot attacked Swiftpaw."

Beyond her, the back and white apprentice's eyes flashed with confusion, and Poisonedsap continued. "He's never been as strong as Revengepaw. He was no match for a fully grown warrior." Her voice lowered into a rasp. "Hickoryroot showed no mercy, clawing and slashing at him... He wanted to kill him, I could tell!"

The clan watched in amazement as Poisonedsap turned and quickly padded back to her kits. She pulled Swiftpaw close with her paw

and rubbed her muzzle against his cheek, choking out a sob. "Hickoryroot wanted to kill my poor Swiftpaw, I just know it! Just like he killed Maplefur and Milkblaze!"

[image]

As Swiftpaw shrank back, his blue eyes round, she went on sobbing. "He was about to strike Swiftpaw in the throat, but I got there just in time. I killed him, but not in anger. As a mother. As a mother frantically protecting her kit from a monster." She squeezed Swiftpaw close and wailed, causing him to flinch in her grasp. "Oh StarClan, if I'd lost him too, so soon after Maplefur..." She continued to sob.

For a moment there was silence, then a few murmurs of sympathy. Crowmask and Greenpine exchanged an uncertain look, and Cliffshade muttered something under his breath.

Depthstar hesitated before speaking. "I understand, Poisonedsap. You lost your mate, and losing your kits is an unbearable thought." His eyes narrowed. "But you could have defended Swiftpaw without killing Hickoryroot."

"I acted on a mother's instinct, Depthstar." Poisonedsap let go of Swiftpaw, who backed away as she bowed her head. "I'm sorry."

The clan leader studied her for a long moment. "Killing in battle is against the warrior code, Poisonedsap. You must not let your emotions trigger the dark side of you, the side that you gave up long ago." He paused. "Though I understand your motive, you will be confined to the camp for the rest of the moon."

"I understand. But that won't be a problem, Depthstar," Poisonedsap's eyes grew warm. "I'll be moving into the nursery soon." She looked across the clearing to Cougarfoot, who purred proudly.

As a few cats murmured congratulations, Mistykit looked back at Bloodpaw curiously. Her friend's yellow eyes were lit with frustration, his tail lashing slowly. *He must think Poisonedsap deserves a better punishment.* She thought. *After all, this is murder. But*

if she did it to save Swiftpaw's life... Is it wrong?

Chapter 3

"I spy something... brown!" Mistykit purred.

She and Coldkit sat side by side in the clearing, not far from the nursery. The sun was setting over the pine trees, casting long shadows across the camp. Mistykit watched as her brother studied their surroundings. "Is it a tree?"

"Nope."

"Is it that branch? The ground?" When Mistykit shook her head, Coldkit narrowed his eyes thoughtfully. "Hmm... Oh!" He lifted a paw and pointed it across the clearing where Hawkfeather was sitting outside his den, sorting herbs. "Hawkfeather!"

"Right," Mistykit purred. It was quiet for a moment. "Do you want to play again?" She inquired.

Her brother shook his head. "We've been playing all day." He let out a sigh. "I'm bored."

Mistykit couldn't deny that she was falling under the heavy spell of boredom too. She and Coldkit were getting tired of playing the same old nursery games. There were no other kits in the nursery, and Bloodpaw never visited them. *It's still a quarter moon until we become apprentices! How are we ever going to make it?*

"I taught that cat a lesson!"

Mistykit flicked an ear at the loud purr and turned her head, looking across the clearing. It had been two days since the battle, and Revengepaw was still boasting about how well he'd fought.

"And then I knocked a tabby warrior right off his paws!" Revengepaw was boasting to his brother, his tail swishing back and forth. "That was right before I slashed open that gray cat's muzzle.

You should have seen the blood!"

Swiftpaw's attention was fixed on his paws, which he shuffled uncomfortably. "Err yeah." He hesitated. "Timberstorm wanted me for a training session." He awkwardly slunk away, his tail low.

"Hey!" Revengepaw glared after him, giving a frustrated snort. "I wasn't finished." He stared after his brother for a moment, then looked around boredly. He spotted Mistykit and Coldkit and rose to his paws, strutting over confidently. "How'd you two like to hear about how great I was in the battle?"

"Okay." Coldkit's eyes flashed with interest.

Mistykit looked past Revengepaw to where Swiftpaw was sitting at the side of the clearing, his head low. "Is Swiftpaw okay?" She asked.

"Swiftpaw?" Revengepaw scoffed. "Oh, he's just traumatized by his experience in the battle." He puffed out his white chest. "Not every cat has nerves of stone like me."

Coldkit frowned. "What was it like fighting in a real battle?"

"I thought you'd never ask!" Revengepaw's amber eyes gleamed. "It's greater than you could ever imagine. Surrounded by the yowls and shrieks of your enemies, tufts of fur and blood whirling around you."

While Coldkit's eyes widened, Mistykit spoke up. "Didn't you get hurt?" She asked worriedly.

"Oh, yeah!" The black-legged apprentice's eyes lit up. He twisted his body to show off a long scar across his right shoulder. "I got this! Poisonedsap says I'll have it forever!"

"That's... good?" Coldkit sounded uneasy.

"Yeah! Scars show how tough you are." Revengepaw boasted. "And I'll be the toughest cat in the forest one day."

He's hardly even phased by being in danger and getting a scar! Mistykit

thought in amazement. "You weren't afraid? Not even a little?"

Revengepaw's amber eyes flashed to her. "Of course not! There's no time to be scared in battle. Your instinct takes over." He raised an unsheathed paw to study his claws. "It makes you stronger than anything."

Mistykit stared at the white and black tom, impressed by his words. She couldn't help but admire his confidence and bravery in battle. No other cat seemed quite as triumphant about the victory.

But she remembered that Revengepaw had been fighting for more than most cats. He wanted to avenge Maplefur, his father who had been killed by ThunderClan warriors. "You're so brave! You're going to be a great warrior," She purred.

"You bet I will." Revengepaw lifted his chin proudly.

"Revengepaw!" Cougarfoot crossed the clearing to his apprentice. "Are you up for a quick training session?"

The tom's eyes lit up. "Battle training?"

Cougarfoot narrowed his eyes. "No, I thought we could work on your hunting skills."

"Ugh!" His shoulders drooped. "Fine," He muttered and followed his mentor across the clearing.

Mistykit and Coldkit stared after them for a moment. "Won't it be great when we're apprentices with Revengepaw, Swiftpaw, and Bloodpaw?" She meowed, her boredom replaced with excitement as she imagined training with her clanmates.

"Yeah," Coldkit agreed. "We-"

"Mistykit! Coldkit!" Diamondrain's voice rose from the nursery behind them. "It's getting late. Come inside before it gets cold."

Already? She exchanged a disappointed look with Coldkit before rising to her paws. "Coming, Diamondrain!" She and Coldkit turned and padded into the nursery.

Rosebreeze was already asleep in her nest, her fluffy cream striped tail wrapped around her. Diamondrain lay with one paw rested over the other, her blue eyes warm as she watched her kits. "Did you have fun?" She prompted.

"Yeah, I guess," Coldkit sighed. "But do we have to sleep already?"

Mistykit sat down in front of her mother. "We're nearly six moons. We don't get tired as easily anymore."

"Once we're apprentices, we can stay up as late as we want." Coldkit pointed out.

Diamondrain let out a purr. "We'll see how late you stay up when you start training at dawn every day. You'll be wishing I were pestering you to go to sleep early!"

While Mistykit realized she was probably right, Coldkit stretched his jaws open in a yawn. *Maybe we are a little tired.* She thought, mildly amused.

"Alright, it's time to sleep." Diamondrain swept her tail around Coldkit, gently pulling him toward her. He reluctantly climbed into their nest and curled up into a ball against her belly.

Mistykit settled beside him, resting her chin on her paws. After a moment, she opened her eyes and stared up at her mother. "Diamondrain?"

"Yes, Mistykit?" She prompted.

"Will you miss us when we're apprentices?" She asked. She was so excited to leave the nursery and begin her training, but never thought about how it would effect her mother.

Diamondrain's clear eyes softened with love and sadness. "Of course I will." She leaned down and licked her on the head. "But just because we won't share a nest or a den doesn't mean we won't be together. I'll always be here for you and Coldkit, and I can't wait to watch you grow into brave young warriors."

As Mistykit closed her eyes, she heard her mother murmur.

"I'll be with you every pawstep of the way."

***

"Mistypaw! Wake up!"

Just like when she was a kit, she opened her eyes and found herself looking into the bright yellow gaze of Bloodpaw.

"It's time for training!" Her denmate purred. "Our mentors want all the apprentices to train together today. It's going to be great!"

Yes! I'm an apprentice now! She let out a purr and rose to her paws. Her surroundings vanished, and she found herself in the pine forest. The trees were bright and lush, the grass soft and full under her paws. A warm sun blazed down through the branches, dappling the earth in light.

Mistypaw looked up as a yellow butterfly fluttered over her head, purring happily. *The forest is just as beautiful as I imagined!*

"Mistypaw, come on!" Bloodpaw called out happily. She looked up to see him standing further away, his fur bright red under the sunlight. Beyond him, Revengepaw and Swiftpaw were wrestling, laughing and growling playfully.

Coldpaw whisked past her, his blue eyes bright with excitement. "We're going to practice a hunting crouch! Bloodpaw's going to show us everything he knows!"

I have so much to learn! And what better way than to learn from my friends? She let out a joyful laugh and began bounding after her brother toward Bloodpaw, her eyes fixed on his blazing yellow gaze.

***

"Mistykit! Mistykit!"

She awoke, startled to find Coldkit shaking her shoulder with his paws. "Mistykit, wake up!" He urged eagerly.

"Coldkit, I told you to let her sleep!" Diamondrain scolded gently as Mistykit rose to her paws, letting out a yawn and blinking drowsily. *What's going on?* She felt disappointed to be torn from her pleasant dream. *I thought I was really an apprentice!*

Days and days had passed since that evening Revengepaw had boasted about the battle. Nearly every night Mistykit found herself in a dream world where she and Coldkit were apprentices, joyfully training with Bloodpaw, Revengepaw, and Swiftpaw. Every dream felt more real than the last, and it made awakening from them all the more frustrating.

"I know, but she has to see!" He stared at Mistykit excitedly. "Look at the clearing, you won't believe it!"

Mistykit blinked in confusion. "What are you talking about?" *And why is it so cold?* She stepped away from Diamondrain's warm fur, shivering. Coldkit spun and bounded to the mouth of the den, looking over his shoulder eagerly.

As she joined him, she was unprepared for the brightness of the clearing and shut her eyes for a heartbeat before opening them again, blinking slowly. *What in the name of StarClan...?*

The clearing had been cloaked in a glittering white blanket. Strange flurries drifted down from the sky, adding to the layer of white. "It's snow!" Coldkit purred. "Isn't it amazing?"

"This is snow?" Mistykit breathed, staring into the clearing. *It's beautiful!* Many cats were already outside, clearing snow into piles and gathering reinforcements for the dens.

Her attention snapped away from the clearing as Coldkit took a step forward, his paw sinking into the thick snow. "What are you doing?" She gasped.

"It's cold, but fun!" Her brother let out a purr and bounded forward, and she watched in amazement as he trampled through the snow. "Come on!"

I guess it's safe. Mistykit hesitated before stepping forward into the

snow. She gasped and drew her paw back sharply. *It's so cold! I didn't know anything could be so cold!* She looked up and saw Coldkit crouch, staring back at her teasingly. "You're not scared, are you?"

"Of course not!" Mistykit let out a purr. *I'm not scared of anything! Like Revengepaw!* She surged forward into the snow, ignoring the cold frost seeping into her fur. As she trotted through the snow, feeling the satisfying crunch under her paws, she discovered that Coldkit was right. *It is fun!*

She scooped up a pawful of snow and flung it at her brother. It crumbled against his shoulder, and he froze, spinning to her. "Hey!" He purred and pounced on her, pinning her in the snow.

"Hey, that's cold!" She squeaked and kicked him off, scrambling to her paws and shaking snow from her back. She ran to him and rolled him over in the snow, laughing and purring playfully.

Coldkit batted her lightly, and she backed off of him. "Try this!" He turned and pounced into the snow, letting out a yowl of delight. "It's fun, you sink right into the snow!"

As Mistykit purred and joined her brother pouncing about, she heard Diamondrain call out behind them. "Be careful, kits! Don't stay out for too long, or you'll catch a cold."

She and Coldkit hardly cared as they pounced in the snow, kicking up thick clumps behind them. "It's amazing!" He purred. "It's like the clouds fell from the sky!"

Mistykit couldn't agree more. *I didn't think snow was so amazing!* She pawed at the snow, fascinated as she studied the pawprint she'd left behind.

Suddenly she saw a familiar dark red pelt from the corner of her eye. She looked up to see Bloodpaw standing outside the apprentices den watching them. She perked up excitedly. *Has he seen snow before?* "Bloodpaw!" She called cheerfully. "Come play with us!"

His yellow eyes warmed and he started toward them. *He's coming to*

play with us! Mistykit thought excitedly. *It's been so long since we've done anything together.*

"Bloodpaw!"

He paused, and Mistykit watched as his mentor, Brownstripe, padded through the snow to him, saying something she couldn't hear from this distance.

"What's going on?" Coldkit spoke behind her.

Mistykit turned to him, her tail high in the air. "Bloodpaw's coming to play with us!" She purred. "Let's surprise him and tackle him when he gets here."

Her brother's eyes gleamed with anticipation. "Yeah!" He crouched, and Mistykit turned her attention to Bloodpaw. *Once he's done speaking to Brownstripe, he'll come over.* She thought.

To her surprise, when Brownstripe turned away in the opposite direction of them, Bloodpaw followed. What? Where's he going? "Hey!" She called out and took a step toward him, one paw raised. "Play with us!" She wailed, unable to hide the hurt in her voice.

"Yeah, where are you going?" Coldkit straightened, blinking his puzzled gaze.

If Bloodpaw heard them, he took no notice. He didn't even look at them as he followed Brownstripe out of the camp. For a long moment, Mistykit just stared after him, her chest heavy with hurt. She let her tail droop into the snow and lowered her gaze.

"I... I guess Brownstripe wanted him for training." Coldkit tried to sound positive, but the hurt in his voice was clear as day. "We'll see him later."

Coldkit's right... Mistykit gave herself a shake, trying to ignore the hurt gnawing at her heart. "Yeah..." *Bloodpaw's our friend. He's just busy. Any day now we'll be apprentices too, and it won't be this way anymore. The thought comforted her. Everything will be different soon enough.*

***

The rest of the day had been busy and eventful. That afternoon, Rosebreeze had given birth to three she-kits: Creamkit, Honeykit, and Tinykit. During this time, Mistykit and Coldkit had left the nursery with Diamondrain while Hawkfeather made sure Rosebreeze's kitting went smoothly.

Now, Mistykit and Coldkit sat near Diamondrain in the nursery, staring at Rosebreeze's litter. A purr rumbled in the rosy cream she-cat's throat as she gazed down at the three kits nestled close to her belly. Two were creamy colored like their mother, while the third bore a brown tabby pelt like Brownstripe.

The father of the kits was there now, crouched beside Rosebreeze and resting his head against hers as he gazed at his newborn daughters. "They're beautiful, just like you," He purred.

Mistykit took a cautious step forward to get a better look at the kits. "They're so tiny," She breathed.

"Were we that tiny too?" Coldkit asked, looking back at Diamondrain.

Their mother purred. "Of course, all kits are born very small." She paused and studied her kits. "Which reminds me... You two have grown so much. You're certainly six moons."

Mistykit spun to her, gasping. "We are?"

When Diamondrain nodded, Coldkit's eyes widened. "Does that mean- When are we being apprenticed?"

"Well, I spoke to Depthstar about it this morning." Diamondrain frowned thoughtfully. "So... I'm going to guess any time now."

"Yes!" Mistykit let out a yowl of delight, bouncing on her paws.

She froze when she heard the kits squeaking behind her, startled at her yowl. She looked over her shoulder guiltily as Rosebreeze swept her tail around the kits to calm them, and Brownstripe narrowed his eyes at Mistykit.

"Sorry!" She mumbled, then turned to her mother, lowering her voice. "We're being apprenticed today yet?"

"I'm sure of it." Diamondrain's eyes shone. "I know you-"

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather for a clan meeting!"

Depthstar's yowl made Mistykit's heart explode with excitement. *That's for us!* She exchanged a delighted look with Coldkit before they shot out of the nursery.

Out in the clearing, the rest of the clan was gathering, settling on the now flattened layer of snow. The sun was setting over the camp, turning the snow creamy and causing the frosted surface to glitter.

This is it! Our apprentice ceremony! She started forward only to have Diamondrain pull her back with one paw. "You must wait for Depthstar to call for you," She told them gently. "Sit still and be patient."

Mistykit nodded and sat down with Coldkit, her paws tingling with excitement as she looked at the meeting rock where Depthstar stood, clearing his throat.

"ShadowClan is so fortunate to have so many kits," The clan leader began. "They are the future of the clan, and more important to have than anything. However, leaf-bare will be hard, and more warriors and apprentices will be needed for hunting. And so it is time for two of our kits to become apprentices."

Depthstar raised his head, and Mistykit froze as his blue gaze rested on she and Coldkit. "Mistykit, Coldkit," He called, his voice ringing across the clearing. "Come forward."

It's time! It's really time! Mistykit swallowed, her heart pounding in her chest. She and Coldkit hurried forward, weaving their way through the crowd of cats. When they reached the base of the rock, Mistykit raised her head to meet her leader's gaze, feeling her paws tremble under her.

"Mistykit, Coldkit, you have reached the age of six moons, and it is

time for you to be apprenticed." Depthstar meowed.

She could hardly breathe as she awaited his next words. *Our apprentice names!*

"Mistykit, Coldkit, from this day on, until you receive your warrior names, you will be known as Mistypaw and Coldpaw."

Mistypaw! I'm Mistypaw now! She held up her head proudly, her tail waving excitedly. She turned to Coldpaw and saw the same pride blazing in his eyes. This was the moment they'd been waiting for so long. And this time, it wasn't a dream.

Depthstar studied the warriors below before he continued speaking. "Stripednose, Song, you are ready to take on apprentices. You are young, but wise and responsible. Stripednose, you will be mentor to Mistypaw. Song, you will mentor Coldpaw."

Mistypaw turned to see a tortoiseshell tom step forward from the crowd, flanked by a white she-cat. *That must be Stripednose.* He let out a friendly purr, and Mistypaw excitedly padded forward to touch noses with her mentor. She assumed that Coldpaw was exchanging the same greeting with Song.

As Mistypaw stepped back from him, Depthstar spoke teasingly from above. "Now, I trust that your relationship won't get in the way of training your apprentices."

Both Stripednose and Song looked embarrassed. *They're mates!* Mistypaw understood. *I bet me and Coldpaw will be training together a lot then.* She felt a pang of worry. *What if I never get to train with Bloodpaw and the other apprentices?*

"Of course not, Depthstar," Song purred in response, exchanging a warm look with Stripednose.

"Mistypaw! Coldpaw!"

The cats around them began cheering their new names, and Mistypaw felt overwhelmed by joy. She exchanged an excited look with Coldpaw. "We're really apprentices!" She exclaimed.

"Yeah!" Coldpaw's eyes glowed. "We're going to be the best!"

"Mistypaw! Coldpaw!" Diamondrain was weaving through the crowd as the cats dispersed, her blue eyes shining with pride. When she reached them, she rubbed her head against Mistypaw's, then did the same to Coldpaw. "I'm so proud of you both!" She purred. "I can't wait to hear all about your training."

As Mistypaw purred in response, she noticed a familiar black tom watching them from a distance. Crowmask. He stared through amber eyes that gave away no emotion. She hesitantly met her father's gaze, wondering if he would come to congratulate them. But the moment their eyes met, Crowmask turned away sharply and padded over to the fresh kill pile.

I don't know why he chooses to stay out of our lives. She thought. *But it's alright. He's just another warrior to me, and I'm just another apprentice to him.* Her spirits lifted when she saw Bloodpaw standing near the side of the clearing, watching as Swiftpaw disappeared into the apprentices den.

"Come on!" She gave Coldpaw a nudge and hurried toward her clanmate. *We can spend the rest of the evening making our new nests! And stay up late to talk and play games!* She was excited to hear Bloodpaw's ideas. Surely he'd been looking forward to this day too? "Bloodpaw! Bloodpaw!"

When she and Coldpaw reached Bloodpaw, he was still staring after Swiftpaw, as though unaware of their approach.

"Isn't this great?" Coldpaw prompted. "We're apprentices like you!"

Mistypaw nodded happily, staring at Bloodpaw. "We can train together!"

For a moment, Bloodpaw didn't respond. She waited for him to turn and congratulate them, to offer to help them move into the apprentices den and share all the fun ideas he had planned for them. They'd spend all day training and playing together, practicing battle moves and sharing hunting techniques. Every day would be a new adventure that they'd go through together.

Bloodpaw spun sharply to face them, his fur bristling with anger. "You're not kits anymore!" He snapped, and they jerked back a little in shock, but before Mistypaw could even think, he went on yelling. "You need to stay with your mentors, and focus on training! I don't have time for you!"

She stared back at him wide eyed, her mind spinning and overwhelmed with shock and confusion. His harsh words burned into her mind, and her heart skipped a beat before she felt it break and crumble in her chest, carrying with it all her dreams and expectations.

He can't mean it... He can't! He's our friend! She stared into Bloodpaw's furious yellow eyes, the same ones that had once greeted her with warmth and kindness. "But..." She felt a lump growing in her throat and swallowed, unable to speak.

"Come on, Mistypaw," Her brother growled and lashed his tail, turning away. "We don't need him."

But... We did need him. I did, at least. Mistypaw's heart sunk like a rock straight to the bottom of the river. *And I thought he needed us too...* "Yeah..." She rasped and lowered her head. She stared at Bloodpaw sadly for a long moment, wishing the warmth would return to his yellow gaze. *Like the sun...*

Mistypaw shut her eyes as she turned away and slowly padded after Coldpaw, her tail drooping behind her. Her heavy heart throbbed in her chest as her mind spun with a million questions. *Why doesn't he want anything to do with us? Does he see us as dumb kits? Has being an apprentice changed him? Why can't we stay friends? Why does he hate us?* The pain rose in her chest until she wanted to wail to the sky like a lost kit. *What did I do wrong?*

Chapter 4

"Mistypaw! Coldpaw!"

The soft call from outside the den awoke Mistypaw. She slowly rose her head from her nest and blinked drowsily. Song's white head poked through the mouth of the den. "It's time for training," She told her. "Me and Stripednose are waiting in the clearing."

"Is it dawn already?" Coldpaw moaned and stirred in his nest beside Mistypaw's.

"I'm afraid so." Song's blue eyes were warm with a mixture of sympathy and amusement. "We're going to start the day off by practicing hunting techniques."

Coldpaw's ears perked up as though he were wide awake. "Hunting? In that case, dawn couldn't come soon enough!" He quickly pulled himself to his paws, shaking bits of moss from his fur.

When the warrior laughed and left with a wave of her tail, Mistypaw yawned and stretched out her front legs before standing. *I don't think I'll ever get used to waking up so early!*

"I love learning about new hunting techniques," Coldpaw purred as Mistypaw blinked away sleep. "Song says I've been doing really well."

She and Coldpaw had been apprentices for two moons now, yet it already seemed like it had been forever. Stripednose and Song were kind and patient mentors, and being younger warriors closer to Mistypaw's age somehow made her more comfortable with them. They felt like friends in addition to mentors.

"I like hunting too," Mistypaw purred, turning to face her brother. "I..." She trailed off as she looked past him at the red tabby curled up in his nest, his back to them. Her heart throbbed, and she closed her eyes as she looked away. "I think we'd better go. Song and

Stripednose are waiting."

As she and Coldpaw exited the den, her thoughts clouded with sadness.

Bloodpaw hadn't spoken to them since that day he had snapped at them. He was no longer their friend for reasons she couldn't understand. The pain of not knowing was the worst. How could she put something back together without knowing how it fell apart? *He was our best friend. He liked spending time with us...*

In the clearing, the pale light of dawn peered out from beyond the pine trees. By the meeting rock, Cobratail and Depthstar spoke quietly, likely discussing the daily patrols. Hawkfeather sat outside the medicine den, looking up at the sky with a thoughtful look on his face.

Stripednose and Song stood by the thorn tunnel, their heads close together as they spoke. When the apprentices neared, Stripednose raised his head to Mistypaw and purred a greeting. "Good morning. Ready to learn some new techniques?"

"I always am." Mistypaw tried to sound optimistic, pushing Bloodpaw to the back of her mind.

Coldpaw stepped to her side, his tail high. "Me too!"

Song let out a purr. "I know you are, Coldpaw." She looked aside at Stripednose. "Shall we head to the training clearing?"

"Sounds good." Stripednose dipped his head. "Lead the way."

Song blinked at him warmly. "No, you lead."

"You lead." He purred back.

"No, you!"

"Song, I insist!"

Mistypaw couldn't hold back a purr of amusement and exchanged a look with Coldpaw. Their mentors were mates, and it made their

training sessions quite amusing at times. They always trained them together, meaning less one on one time with Stripednose. But Mistypaw didn't mind, and she doubted Coldpaw did either. It felt as though they had two mentors training each of them rather than one.

"Oh alright, but you're leading tomorrow." Song gently cuffed him over the ear and turned away as he chuckled. "Come along!"

***

Mistypaw crouched in the marsh, cringing as mud seeped between her toes. Her eyes were fixed on a frog sitting on a stone up ahead. She drew in a breath before springing at it.

The frog prepared to flee, but she caught it mid hop and pushed it down into the mud, quickly delivering the killing bite.

"Well done!"

She held the frog in her jaws as she raised her head and turned. Stripednose padded toward her, flanked by Song. "You and Coldpaw are both becoming excellent hunters," He meowed.

Mistypaw dipped her head gratefully as she dropped the frog between her paws. "Thanks!"

"Why don't you and Coldpaw take some time to practice together?" Song suggested. "Hunting in teams is a good skill to know."

Stripednose nodded agreement, his blue eyes rested on his mate in admiration. "That's right. We'll watch you from afar."

"Okay." Coldpaw purred as the warriors turned and crept under some bushes. He turned to his sister. "Come on, let's catch another frog, even bigger than the last!"

Mistypaw studied their surroundings. A low croak caught her attention, and she flicked her ears forward as she spotted a large frog between long blades of grass. "There!" She whispered.

Her brother followed her gaze and quickly saw it. "Okay. I'll stalk it,

you sneak around. I'll scare it toward you."

"Got it." As Coldpaw dropped into a crouch, Mistypaw slowly made her way around the frog at a distance, careful not to step on any twigs that might give her away. When she was directly across from Coldpaw, she crouched and unsheathed her claws, ready to intercept the frog.

It would have been fun to do this with Bloodpaw. Mistypaw thought, her heart sinking just like her paws were in the mud. *I was looking forward to training with him. I had so many dreams about it, but in the end, not one came true... He-*

"Aah!" Mistypaw snapped out of her thoughts, gasping as the frog leaped at her face. She reared back and stumbled awkwardly as it hopped past her and disappeared in some reeds.

Coldpaw's sigh of dismay came a moment later. "Mistypaw, stop daydreaming! That frog leapt right into your paws and you missed it!"

Her pelt burned with embarrassment. "Sorry..." She mumbled and shook mud from her paws.

Coldpaw padded over and studied her for a long moment. "Are you okay?"

If there's anyone I can talk to about it, it's Coldpaw. She looked at her paws. "I was really looking forward to training with Bloodpaw," She confessed quietly. "I miss him."

Coldpaw's eyes flickered with sadness. "I miss him too. I don't know what's wrong with him these days." He hesitated for a long moment. "But he doesn't matter. We have each other, Stripednose and Song, Swiftpaw and Revengepaw. If Bloodpaw wants to be a stick in the mud, let him."

As Mistypaw looked down, he rested his paw on her shoulder. "I'm focusing on my training so I become a great warrior," He meowed quietly. "You should too. No cat is going to hold us back, especially not him."

"Yeah... Thanks Coldpaw." Mistypaw blinked gratefully at her brother. As he turned away, her thoughts clouded once more. *I wish I could let go of him as easily...*

***

After successfully catching a frog together, she and Coldpaw had spent the rest of the morning learning new hunting techniques from their mentors, as well as a few battle moves.

The sun shone high in the sky when they returned to camp. While Coldpaw hurried to speak with Diamondrain, Mistypaw dropped her frog on the fresh kill pile.

"Nice catch."

She looked up, surprised to see Revengepaw standing over her. "Oh, thanks." She felt embarrassed at his praise.

As she sat up, the older apprentice sat down beside her. "I saw what Bloodpaw did to you and Coldpaw last moon. I'm sorry."

"O-Oh." Mistypaw shuffled her paws. *I don't want to talk about it!* "Thanks, but I'm fine."

Revengepaw studied her. "I don't think you are. Look, every cat knows Bloodpaw is weird. It's probably a good thing you're not friends."

I know he's trying to help, but he's only making me feel worse. Mistypaw thought miserably. "I'd rather not talk about it." She mumbled.

"I get it." Revengepaw's muscles flexed as he stretched out his fore paws, his claws scraping the earth. "Just know I'm here for you. I'd never shut you out." He rested his tail on her shoulder.

Mistypaw's pelt grew hot, and she ducked her head, her heart warming at his words. "Err thanks, Revengepaw."

"Hey, how about later we go hunting together?" Revengepaw prompted, his eyes glowing. "I'll show you everything I know, and you can impress Stripednose."

Hunting with Revengepaw? Her heart skipped a beat as she recalled her dreams of training with he, Bloodpaw, and Swiftpaw. Finally, something she'd hoped for would happen! "That would be great!"

"Awesome!" He nudged her. "See you later then." He purred and began padding away, waving his tail behind him. "Keep up those hunting skills!"

"I will!" Mistypaw purred, her spirits lifting as she watched him disappear into the apprentices den. *At least Revengepaw is my friend... He seems to understand what I'm going through and knows just what to say.*

***

Mistypaw watched in amazement as Revengepaw crashed through the bushes, trapping a thrush in his claws before it could take off. "That was great! How did you catch it before it flew away?"

The broad shouldered apprentice dropped the thrush at his paws and shrugged. "It's just practice," He meowed proudly. "If it can't hear you, it can't fly away." He paused, sniffing the air and looking over his shoulder. "I think there's another over there. Why don't you give it a try?"

Mistypaw hesitated. "I can't hunt as well as you. You're more experienced."

"Not for much longer." His eyes gleamed. "Go, you can do it!"

With a purr, she dropped into a hunting crouch, her gaze locked on the bird. It was perched on the lowest branch of a pine tree, unaware of her. She slowly crept forward, aware of Revengepaw watching her every move. *I hope I'm doing this right!*

She leaped, and the bird instantly flapped upward. Her claws brushed harmlessly through tail feathers, and she dropped to the ground, looking up in dismay as the bird flew away into another tree.

Great! She sighed and reluctantly looked back at Revengepaw, expecting him to laugh at her failure.

But to her surprise, he purred and padded to her side. "You almost had it! Great job!"

"Really?" Mistypaw was pleasantly surprised.

"Yeah!" Revengepaw flicked her shoulder with his tail. "Prey is harder when it flies away, right?"

She chuckled, and he looked up at the darkening sky. "We'd better get back to camp."

Mistypaw grew disappointed. "Aww okay." As they gathered their prey and began heading back to camp, she hesitantly looked at him. "Can we do this again sometime?"

"Definitely!" Revengepaw purred, his amber eyes gleaming at her. "Tomorrow you'll catch a thrush, no doubt about it."

I hope so! Mistypaw dipped her head, her heart warm for the first time in moons. *This is exactly what I hoped for. A friend to spend my apprenticeship with!*

***

It was dark when they reached the camp. To Mistypaw's surprise, many cats were gathered around the nursery. She saw Coldpaw sitting beside Diamondrain and hurried over. "What's going on?"

"Poisonedsap is kitting," Coldpaw meowed, seeming uninterested as he watched from a distance. He paused and looked at her. "Where have you been?"

Mistypaw let out a purr, turning her head as Revengepaw padded over to Swiftpaw, meowing something to him. "I went hunting with Revengepaw. I almost caught a thrush, and he was really impressed! Tomorrow we're going to hunt again."

"Revengepaw?" Coldpaw blinked. "What do you want to hang out with him for?"

"What do you mean?" Mistypaw glanced at him in surprise. "Why wouldn't I? He's our denmate!"

"I don't know. He's not the most likable cat." Coldpaw twitched his tail. "He's violent and arrogant. Always talking about battle."

Mistypaw bristled defensively. "He's just upset about Maplefur. And he's really nice once you get to know him!"

Coldpaw simply shrugged, while Diamondrain blinked warmly at her. "I'm glad you've made a good friend, Mistypaw." She paused and looked to the nursery, brightening. "Oh, look!"

Mistypaw followed her gaze and saw Cougarfoot step out of the den, followed by Hawkfeather and Dewstorm. "We have three kits," He meowed, seeming tired.

"Well?" Diamondrain prompted. "What are their names?"

Cougarfoot met her gaze, his eyes dull with confusion for a moment before he responded. "Spiderkit, Amberkit, and Falconkit."

"Those are great names. Congratulations!" Diamondrain purred.

"Yes, congratulations!" Rosebreeze added warmly.

Cougarfoot nodded and slowly moved through the cluster of cats to go to the warriors den. Mistypaw stared after him, puzzled. *He doesn't seem too enthusiastic... Didn't he want kits?*

A pelt brushed hers, and she turned to see Revengepaw sitting beside her, his eyes fixed inside the nursery. "Kits are always great news, aren't they?" A purr rumbled in his throat.

As Mistypaw purred agreement, she couldn't help but feel as though she were being watched. Her pelt pricked with unease as she looked into the nursery. Poisonedsap's amber eyes were fixed on her, gleaming in the dark shadows of the den.

For a heartbeat Mistypaw returned the stare, wondering what it meant. After a moment, Poisonedsap's glowing eyes blinked and lowered to look at her newborn kits.

Maybe she was looking at Revengepaw... He was right beside me. Perhaps she was looking at both of us... But why? She couldn't get

Poisonedsap's gleaming stare out of her head. *Does she think we're having kits someday?*

Chapter 5

The thrush let out a startled squawk as Mistypaw pounced on it, closing her teeth around it's neck before it could take flight.

"Great catch!" Coldpaw meowed from behind her.

She turned to face her brother, purring. "Thanks." She nodded toward the large blackbird rested at his paws, purring. "I don't think I can top that though!"

A few moons had passed now, and most of the snow had melted away. The air remained brisk and hardened the dead grass under her paws. She and Coldpaw had grown significantly in this time, their once fluffy kit fur now sleek and proportionate around their bodies. They had quickly grown used to waking at dawn for training and became exceptional hunters. Neither of them were too eager about battle training, though they quickly became familiar with the moves and strategies Song and Stripednose taught them.

During this time, Bloodpaw seemed to have become very depressed. Mistypaw often saw him crouched alone in the shadows, his yellow eyes dull and pained. Despite how he ended their friendship, it hurt to see him like that. Last moon she considered approaching him, but Revengepaw had talked her out of it.

"He just wants attention." Revengepaw had told her in a growl. "Remember what he said to you? Why should you care about him when he doesn't care about you? I say let him suffer in the hole he's dug for himself."

Mistypaw guiltily agreed with him. Bloodpaw didn't care about her. What if she tried to comfort him and he pushed her away? She didn't think she could take any more painful words from him. Perhaps it was best she avoided him.

"Well done, Mistypaw!" Stripednose stepped out from behind the trunk of a pine tree where he'd been observing. He padded forward

to join Mistypaw, who was now at shoulder height with him. "Catching a bird isn't easy, especially for ShadowClan cats. But you've been very successful the past few moons."

She let out a purr, curling her tail. "I've had lots of practice with Revengepaw." Since that evening, they had continued to hunt together almost every day. Though once or twice now, Revengepaw had disappeared for most of the day. Mistypaw couldn't find him, nor Swiftpaw or Poisonedsap. It puzzled her that they vanished without any explanation, and when she questioned Revengepaw upon his return, he wouldn't give her any information.

"Both of you are going to be some of the best hunters in the clan!" Song purred as she joined her mate, sitting and curling her white tail around her. "You should be proud."

As Mistypaw and Coldpaw exchanged a look of pride, Stripednose looked over his shoulder toward the camp. "We'd better get back to camp. The elders will be glad to have this prey."

As Song rose to her paws, Mistypaw grasped her thrush by the neck and turned, padding to Coldpaw's side as the four headed back through the trees.

When they reached the camp and emerged from the thorn tunnel, the sun was setting over them. Many cats were sharing tongues in the clearing. Rosebreeze and Brownstripe were settled outside the nursery, watching as their kits played. Foxshadow and Blackstorm spoke quietly in the shadows, glancing around as though afraid someone would overhear them. Boost lay outside the warriors den grooming himself.

Mistypaw dropped her thrush on the fresh kill pile and brightened when she saw Revengepaw. He stood by the base of the meeting rock with Swiftpaw, their attention on Depthstar's den.

I'll tell him about the thrush I caught. She decided and let out a purr, rushing over to him. "Hey, Revengepaw! I-"

Before she could finish, Revengepaw whipped his head around to face her, his eyes blazing eagerly. "Guess what? I passed my

assessment!"

Mistypaw stared at him in amazement. "That's great! I knew you would!" She quickly forgot about her thrush, overjoyed for him. *I completely forgot he and Swiftpaw were having their assessments today!* Beside Revengepaw, Swiftpaw looked calmer, though his blue eyes were alight with excitement.

"Yeah, Cougarfoot is talking to Depthstar now." Revengepaw puffed out his chest. "I told him to tell Depthstar to name me something awesome, like Revengestrike or Revengeseeker!"

Just then, Cougarfoot and Timberstorm emerged from the den, followed by Depthstar himself. While the clan leader leaped onto the meeting rock, Revengepaw stepped forward to meet his mentor. "Did you tell him?" He demanded.

Cougarfoot scoffed, twitching a tufted ear. "Of course not! Depthstar will decide your name." As he padded away, Revengepaw glared after him, lashing his tail.

Cougarfoot is right about that. Mistypaw thought. She hesitantly nudged her shoulder against Revengepaw's. "I'm sure Depthstar will give you a great name."

"He'd better," Revengepaw muttered, sounding unconvinced.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather for a clan meeting!"

Mistypaw looked up as Depthstar yowled from atop the meeting rock. She nodded to Revengepaw before turning to join the crowd forming behind them. She saw Diamondrain sitting near Flameheart and Bloomfire. She quickly sat beside her mother, purring a greeting. Diamondrain rested her warm blue gaze on her and gave her a lick on the head.

Cobratail took his place below Depthstar, studying Revengepaw and Swiftpaw as they moved to the front of the rock, staring up at their leader. Not far from their apprentices watched Cougarfoot and Timberstorm. Poisonedsap watched from the mouth of the nursery,

her amber eyes glowing.

"I, Depthstar, leader of ShadowClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these apprentices," Depthstar's voice rang across the clearing as the cats fell silent. "They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to you as warriors in their turn." He looked down to the two apprentices. "Swiftpaw, come forward."

Revengepaw's eyes flashed with irritation, clearly expecting to have been called upon first. But he remained silent as his brother stepped forward.

"Swiftpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your clan, even at the cost of your life?" Depthstar asked.

Swiftpaw's blue eyes glistened with emotion as he stared up at his leader, as though the question held a deeper meaning to him. One that no other cat could understand. "I do." His voice cracked as he took the oath.

"And Revengepaw." Depthstar's gaze rested on the larger tom who quickly moved forward to Swiftpaw's side. "Do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your clan, even at the cost of your life?"

"I do." Revengepaw's response sounded forced, his tail twitching impatiently.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior names." Depthstar raised his voice. "From this moment you will be known as Revengeheart and Swiftstalker. StarClan honors your courage and strength, and we welcome you as full warriors of ShadowClan."

A purr rose in Mistypaw's throat as the clan began to chant around her, and she quickly joined in. "Revengeheart! Swiftstalker!" She cheered.

Revengeheart held his chin high as he turned to survey the clan around him. He caught Mistypaw's eye and started toward her.

"Revengeheart! Swiftstalker!" Poisonedsap hurried over to greet her sons, and Revengeheart paws, turning his attention to her. "I'm so proud of you." She rubbed her muzzle against his neck, and he gave her a quick lick on the ear. She moved to nuzzle Swiftstalker, whose ears flattened uncomfortably.

Poisonedsap is very close with her kits. Mistypaw thought, her heart warming as she watched them and waited patiently. When Poisonedsap turned away, Revengeheart continued toward Mistypaw, his white raised triumphantly.

She stepped forward to meet him, purring loudly. "Congratulations, Revengeheart."

He shrugged his broad shoulders. "It's an okay name, I guess. Revengeseeker would have been better."

As he spoke, Swiftstalker padded to his brother's side, looking distant and uneasy. Mistypaw purred to him. "Congratulations, Swiftstalker. You-"

"How about tomorrow we go hunting?" Revengeheart shouldered Swiftstalker aside before he could respond. "It'll be my first hunt as a warrior, and I'd like it to be with you."

Mistypaw blushed under his gaze. "Y-yeah, that sounds great!"

He purred and swished his tail behind him, eyes gleaming. "I look forward to it." He turned away and headed toward Mottledface and Foxshadow, greeting them with a chuckle.

Swiftstalker stood still, looking over his shoulder at his brother for a long moment before turning and stepping closer to Mistypaw, speaking quietly. "You should be careful." He seemed to choose his words carefully. "Make the right decision when the time comes."

Mistypaw blinked at him uneasily. "What do you mean?" She became aware of Poisonedsap sitting by the nursery, watching them through narrowed eyes.

Swiftstalker seemed to sense this and didn't respond to Mistypaw, turning away to join Revengeheart and the others. She stared after

him. *Right decision? About what?*

***

It was dawn, the air cool and chilly as Mistypaw padded alongside Revengeheart. The early light lined the pine trees in gold, and birds chirped above them. "How does it feel being a warrior?" She prompted.

Revengeheart purred. "Much better than being an apprentice, that's for sure. I was sick of being ordered around." He paused, studying her. "You'll be having your assessment soon, won't you?"

"I think so," Mistypaw meowed. "Stripednose and Song don't have much more to teach us." She hesitated before adding. "I miss talking to you in the apprentices den."

He gave her a friendly flick on the shoulder with his tail. "I'm sure we'll be seeing more of each other soon enough."

Mistypaw blinked warmly at him. "I can't wait. Then we can-"

A startled yowl echoed through the trees, abruptly cut off. The blood froze in her veins, her startled heart racing. "Some cat is hurt!" She gasped.

Revengeheart blinked at her, seeming unphased. "I didn't hear anything."

"No, something's wrong!" Mistypaw fled in the direction of the sound, ignoring Revengeheart's yowl to stop. Her paws pounded over the earth, kicking up leaves as she headed for the marsh. She rounded the trunk of a pine tree and stopped dead in her tracks, letting out a horrified gasp as her heart skipped a beat in her chest.

Hawkfeather lay on his side in the muddy grass, his yellow eyes wide and sightless. His jaws were parted in a yowl that he had never finished, his toes stretched out as though he had prepared to unsheathe his claws. Blood oozed from deep, ragged teeth marks in his throat.

As Mistypaw grew unsteady on her paws, dizzy with shock,

Revengeheart crashed through the bushes beside her. "What is it?" He paused when he saw the medicine cat's body. "Oh... Hawkfeather..."

"Some cat killed him..." Mistypaw breathed and shut her eyes, not wanting to look at the gruesome discovery. She remembered how moons ago Maplefur and Milkblaze had been found dead on ThunderClan land. *Could ThunderClan be responsible for this too?* She wondered anxiously. *But this is on our territory...* She sniffed the air for ThunderClan scent, but smelled nothing but the reek of blood and fear.

Revengeheart shook his head slowly. "This is horrible. I suppose we'd better take him back to camp."

"No." Mistypaw stared at him. "We should bring Depthstar here and show him. It might be important to know where and how he looked when he died. Otherwise how will we find the killer?"

He studied her for a long moment. "I guess you're right." He started in the direction of the camp, and Mistypaw followed, feeling numb and shocked. *The clan medicine cat has been murdered... Who would do such a thing?*

***

Mottled clouds blanketed the pale sky above the camp. The news of Hawkfeather's death had stunned the clan. Revengeheart and Mistypaw had led Depthstar to the body. After studying the scene of the crime, the clan leader had carried his medicine cat back to camp. He had given nothing away regarding his thoughts on a killer.

The entire clan sat in the clearing, gathered around Hawkfeather's body. Dewstorm was gently grooming his old mentor's tabby pelt, his eyes dull with grief. Hawkfeather's sister, Greenpine, had rested her chin over his shoulder, her eyes shut tight. Behind her, Cliffshade watched solemnly.

Mistypaw sat beside Coldpaw, watching in silence. "I can't believe he's gone," She meowed quietly. "We've known him since we were

kits."

"Yeah. He was a great medicine cat." Her brother responded lowly.

Depthstar stood atop the meeting rock, his clouded gaze rested on the body. After a long while, he raised his head and spoke. "Hawkfeather was a wise and skilled medicine cat. He will be missed dearly. We-"

"Depthstar?" Greenpine raised her head from her brother's body, her green eyes filled with misery. "Who did this?"

Crowmask nodded as he rose to his paws, his amber eyes lit with anger. "It was ThunderClan again! It had to have been!"

"Right!" Foxshadow yowled his agreement. "They killed Milkblaze and Maplefur, and now they've killed Hawkfeather!"

"That's enough!" Depthstar raised his voice, and the others quieted. "Hawkfeather was killed on ShadowClan territory, unlike Maplefur and Milkblaze. There wasn't a trace of ThunderClan scent anywhere near him." He hesitated. "I believe this is the work of a rogue."

Below him, Cobratail flashed his amber eyes at him in surprise. "A rogue? How would one get on our territory without being scented by a patrol?"

"That's what we're going to find out." Depthstar's eyes narrowed. "We will not let Hawkfeather's killer get away with this." He nodded to his deputy. "I'd like you to increase patrols for a while, and if Dewstorm needs to collect herbs, he is to be accompanied by a warrior. We cannot risk more deaths."

"Yes, Depthstar."

As the clan leader continued with Hawkfeather's vigil, Mistypaw wondered why any rogue would murder one of their warriors. *A cat needs a motive to kill. We don't have quarrels with any rogues.* She continued searching for possible answers, but couldn't find any. *If not a rogue, then who? And why?*

Chapter 6

Thick silver clouds blanketed the sky, casting a dull morning light over the forest. A crow perched at the very top of a pine, cawing it's grim cry toward the undergrowth.

Mistypaw tread carefully over the forest floor, her attention fixed on a thrush up ahead, sitting on the lowest branch of a tree. *I have to catch this...* She swallowed nervously. *What if I mess up? I'll fail the assessment!* She paused, staring awkwardly at the bird as she contemplated her next move. She thought back to the hunting techniques that Revengeheart had taught her. *As long as I remember them, I'll be successful.*

She narrowed her eyes determinedly and moved forward through the grass, a soft breeze blowing into her face. *The wind is still on my side.* She thought gratefully. She inched closer and lowered herself to the ground, strewn with pine needles. She judged the distance between herself and the bird once more before leaping forward.

The bird let out an alarmed cry as she grasped it in her claws and slammed it to the ground, quickly biting into it's neck. She stood, holding the limp bird in her jaws proudly.

"Well done!" Stripednose emerged from the bushes behind her, nodding approvingly. He was followed by Song and Coldpaw. Normally, apprentices completed their assessments alone with their mentor, not joined by any others. After Hawkfeather's death two moons ago, Depthstar decided that any cat going into the forest should be accompanied by at least two other cats, just in case these murderous rogues were about.

Mistypaw beamed at his praise and hurried back toward the others, adding the thrush to her pile of mice and frogs. "So..." She looked at her mentor nervously. "Did I pass...?"

For a moment, the tortoiseshell tom gave nothing away. Then his blue eyes gleamed, and he let out a purr. "Of course you did!"

Her heart burst with excitement, and Coldpaw bounded forward to meet her, his tail high. "We're going to be warriors!" He purred.

We're really getting our warrior names today! Mistypaw could hardly believe it. *After all these moons of training, it's finally time!*

"Let's go back to camp," Song purred, curling her white tail. "We'll tell Depthstar the good news."

Mistypaw lowered her head and grasped her thrush, while Stripednose gathered the rest of her prey. She looked up toward Coldpaw, impressed to see two massive frogs, a thrush, and several mice that he and Song were scooping up. *Coldpaw has become an incredible hunter.* She thought in amazement. *I think he's mastered skills that even Revengeheart doesn't know.*

As they began heading back to camp, she brightened at the thought of the black-legged warrior. *I can't wait to tell him I passed my assessment! I think I'll give him my thrush.* She decided warmly. *To thank him for his hunting advice.*

As they reached the camp and deposited their prey on the fresh kill pile, Cobratail was sitting by the meeting rock, his tail curled over his black paws. When he spotted them, he rose. "I assume the apprentices passed?" He prompted.

"They certainly did," Stripednose meowed warmly. "You can tell Depthstar he'll be holding a warrior ceremony today."

"Excellent!" Cobratail purred and rested his amber gaze on the two young cats. "Congratulations, you two."

Mistypaw and Coldpaw lifted their chins proudly. "Thank you!" She purred. As the clan deputy turned away, she looked around for Revengeheart, excited to share her news. She spotted his broad white shoulders by the side of the clearing. He had his back to her, speaking with Blackstorm and Mottledface.

She let out a purr and grabbed her thrush, quickly crossing the clearing toward him. As she neared, she heard Blackstorm speaking.

"I don't want to waste time with young cats," The dark warrior was

grumbling. "Why can't some other warrior deal with Poisonedsap's kits?"

"You know why!" Revengeheart let out a growl that surprised Mistypaw, and she slowed, hesitant to interrupt when he was angry. "The kits need to be trained by us, or they'll never fulfill their purpose."

Purpose? What sort of purpose does Poisonedsap want for her kits? Mistypaw wondered, puzzled. *Surely it doesn't matter which warriors train them?*

Mottledface's amber eyes flashed beyond Revengeheart at Mistypaw, and he gave a meaningful cough. Revengeheart quickly turned his head, eyes lit with mingled alarm and anger. "What?" He hissed.

Mistypaw started backwards in alarm. "I'm sorry-" She mumbled around the thrush, wondering if she should leave.

But Revengeheart's eyes quickly warmed, and his bristling fur flattened. "Oh, Mistypaw!" He chuckled and turned fully to face her. "Sorry, you startled me." He tilted his head while behind him, Blackstorm and Mottledface exchanged an amused look. "What's up?"

She hesitated before dropping the thrush. "I passed my assessment," She meowed, her excitement quickly returning.

Revengeheart stared at her for a moment before letting out a purr. "That's great! I'm proud of you."

"You are?" Mistypaw blinked at him shyly.

"Of course." Revengeheart lifted a black forepaw and licked it, swiping it over his ear. "Well done."

He's really proud of me. Mistypaw thought, beaming with pride herself. She hesitated before nudging her thrush toward him. "I-I want you to have this," She purred shyly. "To thank you for the hunting lessons and advice."

Revengeheart looked surprised, blinking down at the bird for a moment. Her heart pounded nervously. *Isn't he grateful? Should I take it back?* Then he met her gaze and purred loudly. "Thanks!" He lowered his head and sniffed at the thrush. "It's a good catch. You should hunt for me more often."

Mistypaw let out a purr of amusement, but the white warrior said nothing. *That* was *a joke, wasn't it?* Before she could ask, Poisonedsap's meow across the clearing caught her attention. She turned to see the queen padding out of the leader's den alongside Depthstar.

"So, you'll assign those cats as mentors?" Poisonedsap demanded.

The clan leader's tail swished with annoyance, as though this had been a very long disagreement. "Yes, Poisonedsap," He sighed. "I suppose there's no arguing with you."

The golden furred queen's eyes warmed with satisfaction. "Thank you, Depthstar," She purred. "I want the very best for my kits."

"Depthstar." Cobratail dipped his head as the leader approached. "Mistypaw and Coldpaw have passed their assessments."

The bluish black tom nodded. "Wonderful. I'll hold both ceremonies now." He sprang onto the meeting rock and faced his clan, raising his voice. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather for a clan meeting!"

As the clan began to gather, Coldpaw bounded over to Mistypaw, eyes shining. "Come on!" With a farewell purr to Revengeheart, she followed her brother toward the front of the crowd. Poisonedsap was following her kits toward the meeting rock.

"Hurry up, Falconkit!" Amberkit yowled as she and Spiderkit ran to sit in front of the rock.

Their brother ran after them on short legs. "I'm coming!" He squeaked. Poisonedsap growled and gave him a fierce nudge with her muzzle, and Falconkit yelped as he stumbled into Amberkit. His sister hissed and cuffed him over the ear. Behind Poisonedsap,

Cougarfoot sat down and watched his kits uncertainly.

"Cats of ShadowClan," Depthstar began. "Once again, our clan is thriving with young cats. I'm honored to hold so many ceremonies for the future of ShadowClan." He looked down. "Spiderkit, Amberkit, and Falconkit. You have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed."

"No kidding!" Amberkit squeaked impatiently.

Spiderkit's eyes widened, and he gave her a sharp nudge. "Shhh!"

Mistypaw frowned, wondering what Depthstar would say about Amberkit's rudeness. But the clan leader didn't seem to hear her comment. Or he decided to ignore it. "Spiderkit, Amberkit, and Falconkit, from this day on, until you receive your warrior names, you will be known as Spiderpaw, Amberpaw, and Falconpaw."

As Mistypaw watched the kits exchange excited looks, she noticed a nick in Spiderkit's ear. *Where could he have gotten that?* She wondered in alarm. *Kits don't get into fights!*

"Revengeheart."

Her ears perked as Depthstar spoke her friend's name. A moment later, the tom strolled past her toward the new apprentices. "You are ready to take on an apprentice." The clan leader hesitated as he studied Revengeheart, seeming to choose his words carefully. "You are strong and experienced in battle. I trust that you will pass these skills down to Falconpaw, as well as teach him what it means to be a warrior."

Falconpaw's amber eyes were wide and nervous as he approached the broad shouldered warrior. Revengeheart bumped his nose against his rather roughly, his eyes narrowed with determination.

He'll be a great mentor. Mistypaw thought with a flash of admiration for him.

As Revengeheart and Falconpaw stepped aside, Depthstar went on. "Blackstorm, you will be mentor to Amberpaw."

The small golden she-cat looked at her mentor in awe before padding forward to meet him, eagerly touching her nose to his.

"And Mottledface, you will mentor Spiderpaw." Depthstar finished. As the two touched noses, the clan began cheering the names of the new apprentices.

"Amberpaw! Spiderpaw! Falconpaw!"

Poisonedsap's amber eyes glittered as she watched her kits with the mentors she had requested for them. Cougarfoot watched for a moment longer before turning away, his head low.

As the crowd quieted, Depthstar spoke again. "Additionally, two young cats have completed their training and are ready to become warriors." Mistypaw's heart skipped a beat as his blue gaze rested on her. "Mistypaw and Coldpaw, come forward."

Mistypaw stepped forward to take the place of the new apprentices at the front of the rock, staring up at her leader excitedly as Coldpaw joined her. *It's time!*

"I, Depthstar, leader of ShadowClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these apprentices." He began. "They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to you as warriors in their turn." He paused. "Mistypaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your clan, even at the cost of your life?"

Mistypaw's heart pounded in her chest. "I do."

"And Coldpaw," Depthstar turned his gaze to her brother. "Do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your clan, even at the cost of your life?"

"I do," Coldpaw meowed happily.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior names." Depthstar paused. "From this moment you will be known as Mistybreeze and Coldpebble. StarClan honors your courage and strength, and we welcome you as full warriors of ShadowClan."

Mistybreeze's tail curled behind her as her heart beamed with joy. *Mistybreeze! I'm a warrior now!*

"Mistybreeze! Coldpebble!" The clan cheered.

She looked toward Revengeheart, expecting to see him cheering for her as well. But he was speaking to Falconpaw among the crowd. She tried to push away her hurt. *He has an apprentice now. It's nothing personal.*

"Mistybreeze! Coldpebble!" Diamondrain appeared at their side, her blue eyes filled with love and joy. "I'm so proud of you both!" She gave Coldpebble a lick on the head, then turned to nuzzle Mistybreeze. Crowmask watched from afar, and Mistybreeze thought she saw a flicker of pride in his eyes.

"Hey..."

Mistybreeze's fur prickled at Bloodfur's voice behind her. It had been moons since he'd made any attempt to speak to them. She resisted the instinct to turn around. *I don't think I can look at his face without getting upset...*

"I-I just wanted to congratulate you. You'll both make great warriors."

Go away! Mistybreeze shut her eyes, her heart throbbing with the same ache she had felt the day he yelled at she and Coldpebble. *He already ruined our apprentice ceremony. I'm not letting him ruin this too. Revengeheart would agree.*

Coldpebble too was ignoring Bloodfur. He narrowed his eyes at Mistybreeze and turned toward the fresh kill pile, gently nudging her. "Let's get something to eat," He suggested. "I'm starving!"

She forced a purr as she followed him. Though as they crossed the clearing, she couldn't resist casting a look over her shoulder.

Bloodfur stood near the dispersing crowd, his yellow eyes dull with sadness as he watched her and Coldpebble. *Maybe now you'll understand how much you hurt us.* Mistybreeze thought as she forced her attention away from him. But the image of Bloodfur's pained

gaze burned in her mind.

Chapter 7

The sun was setting over the forest, the branches of the pine trees shivering against a cool breeze. Mistybreeze sat beside Revengeheart, watching as Foxshadow dealt the killing bite to a frog.

"Nice catch!" Mottledface purred across from them, his tail swishing over pine needles. Not far from the brown warrior, Amberpaw stared at him in awe.

"Wow!" She exclaimed. "That's the biggest frog I've ever seen!"

Foxshadow's eyes gleamed. "Not bad, eh?" He bent to grab his catch, then padded over to her and dropped the frog at her paws. "You'll need energy. After sundown you'll do some battle training."

Unease twisted Mistybreeze's belly as she watched Amberpaw crouch and eagerly rip a chunk of flesh from the frog. *The warrior code says that the elders must be fed first...* It had been a couple days since she'd earned her warrior name, and Poisonedsap's kits had been apprenticed. Though Revengeheart, Mottledface, and Blackstorm spent most of the day training their new apprentices, they allowed Mistybreeze to join them.

But the way her friends trained their apprentices seemed... Wrong. They allowed their apprentices to eat what they caught, and focused on battle training. They knew little to nothing about the warrior code. Mistybreeze knew nothing about being a mentor, but remembered how she and Coldpebble had been trained by Stripednose and Song.

What would they say if they saw this? She wondered as Amberpaw raised her head and licked frog blood from her lips. *What would* Depthstar *say if he saw this?*

"Revengeheart." Mottledface stepped toward the black legged tom, breaking Mistybreeze out of her thoughts. "How about we take

Spiderpaw and Falconpaw to the training clearing and see how they do?"

The apprentices flexed their claws and exchanged an excited look. Revengeheart hesitated. "You can take them. I'll join you later." He turned to Mistybreeze, an unreadable gleam in his eyes. "There's something I need to do first."

Mistybreeze's fur prickled in surprise. "Hmm?"

"Would you like to go for a walk with me?" Revengeheart asked in an unusually soft tone. "I want to talk to you about something."

The way he spoke troubled her. *This isn't like him... Is something wrong?* Her stomach began to churn with worry. "O-okay."

"Perfect." Revengeheart brushed past her, waving his tail briefly to the others. Mistybreeze watched thoughtfully as he paused between two pines, looking over his shoulder at her. The glow of sunset bathed his white fur in gold and reflected in his glittering amber eyes. "Are you coming?"

Mistybreeze stared admiringly as he stood so majestically in the sunlight. He's really a great cat. She padded forward to join him, and he continued onward.

She and Revengeheart walked side by side through the forest. Neither said a word as they moved through the trees, their shadows casting over them like massive stripes. The silence was broken occasionally by the chirping of a bird. Mistybreeze looked at her companion curiously. *What's wrong? What does he want to talk about that the others can't hear?*

She was about to voice her concern when Revengeheart paused in a small clearing and turned to her. "You know, Mistybreeze, you're a very special cat to me." He spoke quietly and softly.

Mistybreeze met his gaze, her heart skipping a beat. Never before had she heard him speak so softly. So humbly. What he had to say was not about himself. It was about her. "I-I am?" She was so taken back her voice came out as a squeak, and she flattened her ears in

embarrassment.

"Of course." His eyes gleamed. "You're clever, kind, great at hunting. You're the only cat who really knows me." He hesitated and shuffled his paws. "And that's why I have something important to ask you..."

What? Is this really happening? Is he... Mistybreeze's breath caught in her throat as she waited for his next words, praying to StarClan she was right about what they would be.

Revengeheart's glittering amber gaze rested on hers, his face half concealed by the shadow of a pine tree, while the rest of his body glowed in the light of sunset. "Will you be my mate?" He asked, his usually rough voice smooth as honey. "You're the only cat I want by my side."

The forest seemed to whirl around her as she grew light headed, her heart racing with excitement at his proposal. "Y-yes!" She exclaimed, a loud purr rumbling in her throat. "Of course I will!"

She pushed her head forward into his thick white neck fur, and he let out a rumbling purr. "I'm happy to hear that."

He gave her shoulder a brief lick, and Mistybreeze drank in his scent, overwhelmed with joy. The one cat she admired, who had shown her such kindness and companionship felt the same way about her. But was there any question about it? They got along so well, StarClan must have intended for them to have a future together. As setting sun fell into darkness, Mistybreeze knew one thing for certain. *This is the best moment of my life.*

***

That night, Mistybreeze's dreams were full of warmth and happiness. She found herself laying in a field of flowers, sunbathing beside Revengeheart. She purred and rolled over, admiring the bright yellow flowers before her. *They're so bright, like the sun!* She closed her eyes, relishing under the warm sunlight, then opened them again. Her heart skipped a beat.

Suddenly, they were no longer flowers, but the yellow eyes of

Bloodfur, glistening with sadness. The same eyes she'd seen after her warrior ceremony. Startled, she scrambled backwards into Revengeheart, who let out a sharp hiss.

Mistybreeze jolted awake, startled when she felt a warm body against her rear and the hiss continue outside her dream. She spun to see Coldpebble crouched in his nest, his drowsy blue eyes flashing with alarm. "Hey, get off my tail!"

"Oh!" She realized one of her hind paws was planted firmly on her brother's tail and quickly scrambled forward to her own nest. *I must have backed up into him in my sleep.* "Sorry!"

As her brother gave his tail a few quick licks, she peered outside the entrance to the warriors den. It was early morning, and many warriors were already awake. Mistybreeze turned toward Revengeheart's nest, pricking her ears hopefully, but it was empty. *Maybe Cobratail sent him on the dawn patrol.* She rested her chin on her paws, purring quietly as she thought of the black and white warrior.

Coldpebble arched his back and yawned as he stretched his legs. "What's up with you?" He asked in amusement. "You've been purring in your sleep all night."

"I have?" Mistybreeze flicked an ear back in embarrassment. How many other cats noticed?

"Yes!" The dark gray pointed tom purred. "So what's gotten you so happy?"

Mistybreeze hesitated, her pelt hot with embarrassment. But she was so excited, she just had to tell someone. She knew she could trust her brother. She moved out of her nest to crouch beside him. "Well... Yesterday Revengeheart asked me to be his mate." She was unable to hide the joy in her voice, her heart warm as she remembered the moment.

"What?" Coldpebble's blue eyes widened. "What did you say?"

She let out a purr of amusement. "What do you think I said? Of

course I said yes!"

"Really?" Mistybreeze was surprised when she saw no excitement on Coldpebble's face, only pure shock and disbelief. "You took *Revengeheart* as a mate? I'm no she-cat, but I think you're crazy!"

She bristled defensively, surprised at his disapproval. "What do you mean? He's a great warrior!"

"Great warrior, yes." Coldpebble twitched his tail. "But is he a great cat?"

"Of course he is!" She snapped to Revengeheart's defense. She couldn't believe her ears. "You just don't know him like I do."

"Right." Coldpebble glanced at his paws, clearly troubled. "Well... I just hope you made the right choice."

She felt a pang of guilt for snapping at her brother. *He's only worried about me. But of course I made the right choice. There was no question about it.* Her anger faded as he stood and started toward the mouth of the den. Coldpebble paused and looked over his shoulder. "Be careful, Mistybreeze. I have a bad feeling about that cat." When she didn't respond, he looked away and continued into the clearing.

***

A quarter moon had passed since that morning. Dark gray clouds blotted the evening sky as Mistybreeze padded through the trees, the ground cold and damp under her paws. In her jaws she carried a crow she'd been lucky enough to catch before it flew off. The cool air carried with it the scent of rain, hurrying her. *I want to get back to camp before the rain starts. And Revengeheart won't like a wet crow!*

When she reached the camp, she saw that most cats were sharing tongues and eating prey in their dens, preparing for the rain. By the medicine den, Dewstorm and Creampaw had lain oak leaves out in the sun to dry. Now, they were carefully moving them into the den where their work wouldn't be ruined by the rain. Mistybreeze scanned the clearing for her companions.

"Mistybreeze!"

She turned her head quickly and saw Revengeheart crouched by the thorn bushes waiting for her. She hurried over and settled beside him, dropping the crow at his paws. "Here you go." She purred.

"Thanks." Revengeheart crouched and ripped off a wad of black feathers before digging in. It wasn't uncommon for him to ask her to bring prey for him. Though she knew he was capable of hunting for himself, she didn't mind. *We're mates now. Of course we should do things for each other. He'd do the same for me, but I just can't bring myself to ask anything of him. Being my mate is enough.*

"You're it, Flintkit!"

Mistybreeze flicked her ear at the squeak and looked toward the nursery. Greenpine sat by the den, watching warmly as Ebonykit poked her brother in the shoulder and dashed off. The orange tabby kit laughed and started chasing her around the clearing.

As the kits ran past the warrior's den, Flintkit tripped over a stone and let out a squeak, tumbling over and letting out a wail. Greenpine's eyes flashed with alarm, but Mistybreeze was faster. She shot over and crouched by the sobbing kit, gently nudging his shoulder with her muzzle. "Are you alright?"

"My paw hurts!" Flintkit whined as Greenpine reached him, giving his head a comforting lick. Ebonykit hurried to her brother's side, her eyes wide and anxious.

"It's alright Flintkit, you're alright." Their mother reassured him.

The orange tom kit whimpered. "No I'm not! I'm dying!"

"It's probably just bruised," Mistybreeze meowed gently. "Don't worry. Me and Coldpebble tripped too sometimes when we were kits."

Flintkit stared up at her, yellow eyes round. "And you still lived to be warriors?"

Mistybreeze let out an amused purr. "Yes, we did. And so will you."

"Come on, it's time you took a nap anyway." Greenpine purred, then

blinked warmly at Mistybreeze. "Thank you."

She nodded and watched as the tabby queen guided her kits back into the nursery. *I'm sure Flintkit is fine. But maybe Dewstorm should take a look at him anyway? What if-*

"You'll be a great mother."

Revengeheart's meow so close to her ear startled her, and she spun to see him sitting behind her, his amber eyes shining. "I can't wait to have kits of our own. You want some, don't you?"

"Oh..." With a start, Mistybreeze realized that she'd never thought about having kits before. She liked kits, sure. But having her own to raise...? The thought made her stomach churn. *There's so much responsibility! I don't think I'm ready for a family. I just want to enjoy spending time with Revengeheart.*

"I-I'm not sure." She admitted, shuffling her paws. "I don't think I want any right now. Maybe when we're older, but..."

Revengeheart stared at her, his amber eyes flashing with something unreadable. "Hmm." He hesitated for a long moment. "You need some time to think about it."

I just thought about it. Mistybreeze blinked. "But I-"

"It's time." Poisonedsap appeared at her side, startling her. Suddenly, she and Revengeheart were no longer alone. Blackstorm, Foxshadow, and Amberpaw flocked around them.

"Are we all ready to go?" Mottledface prompted as he stepped to Revengeheart's side, followed by Spiderpaw.

"Ready to go?" Mistybreeze's eyes flicked from cat to cat, wildly confused. "What do you mean? Where?" A raindrop landed on her nose, and she became aware of the rain pattering around them, quickly growing heavier. The sky had darkened. The storm had begun.

Poisonedsap narrowed her eyes at her before glancing over at Revengeheart. "Is she coming?"

"Of course." Revengeheart flicked his ear. "It's time she was introduced."

Introduced? Mistybreeze's heart pounded with unease as heavy raindrops fell onto her back. "To who?" She dared to ask as thunder rumbled in the distance.

Revengeheart seemed unbothered by the rain as it slicked his white pelt to his muscular frame. He looked almost amused as he answered Mistybreeze's question, thunder crackling over the dark pines behind him. "Deserve's Army, of course!"

Chapter 8

Lightning crackled overhead, followed by the low rumble of thunder as the ShadowClan cats headed through the dark woods. Mistybreeze shivered, her drenched fur plastered to her thin body and darkened by heavy rain. Now and then she tried to move closer to Revengeheart for warmth, but a low growl rumbled in his throat whenever she did so. *He just wants his space.* She told herself, though she felt unsure.

Ahead of her, Mottledface and Foxshadow walked near Blackstorm, speaking excitedly, though their words were drowned out by the rain. Swiftstalker trailed behind Blackstorm.

Poisonedsap was in the lead, her ragged tail dragging in the mud behind her. She suddenly glared over her shoulder, amber eyes glinting in the night. "Keep up, you three!" She spat. "We have to get there and back before we're missed."

Mistybreeze glanced over her shoulder, squinting as rain pattered at her face. The three apprentices were lagging behind, especially Falconpaw, who dragged his paws in the mud. "I'm tired from battle training!" The orange tabby protested, twitching his ear as a raindrop struck it. "Where are we going, anyway? What is this *army?*"

His mother looked ahead and didn't respond. Mistybreeze too shared Falconpaw's curiosity. *Deserve's Army? Why do I need to be introduced to them? Who are they?* She looked aside at Revengeheart and hesitantly spoke. "Revengeheart? Where exactly are we going?"

The black legged warrior flicked his amber gaze to her. "Deserve's Army." He said as if it were a simple fact.

"I-I know, but-"

"You'll find out soon enough." A smile spread across his face. Though it should have been a comforting sign, it sent unease

prickling her fur.

The ShadowClan cats continued moving through the trees as heavy rain battered around them. Mistybreeze grew more and more nervous as they ventured deeper into unfamiliar territory. *We're so far from the forest now...*

Suddenly, Poisonedsap stopped, her tail swishing slowly. The other cats did so as well, studying their surroundings. Mistybreeze raised her chin and sniffed the air. Through the damp smell of the forest, she could pick up the scent of other cats. But it was not that of any clan she knew, or of a rogue or kittypet. *This is a different scent...*

The bushes rustled ahead of Poisonedsap, and Mistybreeze tensed, instinctively shifting closer to Revengeheart. Two cats slunk out of the undergrowth; one a young white pawed black tom, the other a ginger tabby she-cat.

"Poisonedsap," The tom grunted, twitching his black tail. "Good to see you."

The golden she-cat purred. "We have some cats to introduce to your father, Crow."

Crow's amber eyes flicked as he surveyed the others. Mistybreeze's heart pounded nervously as he caught her eye. "I can see that. We'll escort you to the camp." He jerked his head to his companion. "Sunset, follow us."

As Crow turned away and led the ShadowClan cats onward through the forest, Sunset took up the rear of the group, eyes narrowed. As they moved, Spiderpaw and Falconpaw cast a few nervous looks over their shoulders at the she-cat.

Mistybreeze's heartbeat quickened with unease as she followed the others through a small gap in a wall of bushes. The strange scent was stronger here. *I guess I'm about to get some answers...* As she emerged at the other side, her eyes widened.

She and the others had entered a clearing, very similar to a clan camp. There were cats everywhere, some sitting about in

discussion, while others shared prey. *I thought an army would be bigger...* She relaxed a little. *These cats seem just like a clan. Perhaps they're friends?*

"Deserve!" Crow called, drawing the group to a halt in the center of the clearing, glancing over his shoulder at his followers. "The clan cats are here."

A heartbeat later, a broad shouldered black tom emerged from a leafy den. His white paws seemed to glow in the darkness as he headed forward to meet them. "Crow?" He sounded confused. "Why did you lead them here? That's Castiel's job."

The young tom's eyes narrowed. "Castiel was out leading a hunting party." He reminded his father. "Me and Sunset were out on patrol and-"

"Then you should have stayed out on patrol." A growl rumbled in the older cat's throat. "Castiel is in charge of everything involving the clans. Is that understood?"

Crow's amber eyes flared with anger, and for a moment Mistybreeze worried he might attack this green eyed cat. But instead, he hissed through gritted teeth. "Yes, Deserve." He whipped around, stalking angrily out of the camp. Sunset hesitated before following.

So that's Deserve. Mistybreeze thought, watching the tom curiously. *He must be the leader.*

"Welcome, Poisonedsap," Deserve nodded to the she-cat. "How are things?"

The golden brown she-cat sat down, her amber eyes glittering as she gazed at him. "Oh, wonderful. Hawkfeather is dead."

Mistybreeze shot the she-cat a startled look. *Why is she saying that like it's good news?* She remembered the horrible day she and Revengeheart had discovered the medicine cat's body. *There's nothing* wonderful *about it!*

Deserve's green eyes gleamed. "So I've heard." He looked over his shoulder, nodding as a black tom emerged from the same den

Deserve had. Mistybreeze's blood froze with shock as she recognized him. *That's Ravenfeather! The RiverClan deputy! What's he doing here?*

"Hello, Poisonedsap." Ravenfeather spoke as he reached them, sitting near the army leader. "I was just telling Deserve about our latest accomplishments."

Accomplishments? Mistybreeze's heart pounded heavily in her chest. She looked around the camp and noticed the army members watching them with interest. Blackstorm flexed his claws while Foxshadow's eyes glittered with ambition. Something's wrong here... Something is very wrong here.

She turned questioningly to Revengeheart, hoping he would explain. The white tom glanced at her, his ears perking up. "Oh, yes." Mistybreeze let out a surprised gasp as he shouldered her aside and herded her forward until she was directly in front of Deserve.

Mistybreeze lowered her head anxiously, freezing under Deserve's gleaming emerald gaze as Revengeheart went on. "This is Mistybreeze. She's a new recruit." *N-new recruit??* Her mind whirled anxiously. *I don't understand! Recruit for what?*

"And these are my new kits." Poisonedsap waved her tail to the apprentices, who stared at Deserve curiously.

Deserve gave a nod of approval. "The more claws to help us in battle, the better."

Revengeheart scoffed. "Oh, Mistybreeze won't be much use in battle." His eyes narrowed. "She'll be helping us in other ways."

Battle?? What?? Help?? Mistybreeze was taken back by Revengeheart's words. She dared to speak up. "Wait- I don't understand! What battle? What's happening?" *What have I gotten myself into??*

Deserve's eyes narrowed. "She doesn't know?" When Revengeheart shook his head, the army leader went on. "This is Deserve's Army, Mistybreeze. We share an allegiance with some of your clanmates."

"They helped us get rid of Hawkfeather and Starfaith," Foxshadow

sneered. "It's just a shame they failed with Dewstorm."

What?? Cold dread shot through Mistybreeze's veins like lightning. *They did it! They attacked Starfaith and Dewstorm at highstones!* Suddenly, she understood everything. ShadowClan had been losing warriors for moons. After Depthstar decided that ThunderClan was not to blame, he decided it must be rogues committing the crime. *Only they aren't rogues... This is an army! A group of killers!*

"Milkblaze... Hawkfeather... Rosebreeze..." Mistybreeze staggered backwards, her eyes rounded with fear. "T-that was you!"

"I took care of Milkblaze." Poisonedsap raised a black paw and studied her claws. "He was... interfering."

Mistybreeze trembled as she turned to Revengeheart, whose expression was unreadable. "Revengeheart..." She rasped, daring to meet his cold gaze. "Please, tell me this isn't true." He didn't respond, an answer in itself. "I don't understand... Maplefur! They killed your father! How can you-"

"Maplefur was weak!" Revengeheart growled, his white fur bristling. "He was worthless and deserved to die." As he spoke, Swiftstalker swallowed, his blue eyes flashing with pain.

Mistybreeze gaped at him in astonishment. "But your name! You changed it in his honor. All you've wanted is to avenge his death!"

She stared in disbelief as Revengeheart let out an amused chuckle. "That's what the clan thinks! It was Poisonedsap's idea. She wanted me to have a fierce name, just like hers."

"Giving into clan ways meant that I needed to give my kits stupid names, like Stone and Swift," Poisonedsap grunted in disgust. "Maplefur's death gave us the perfect opportunity to change that without any cat being too suspicious." She flashed a glare at Swiftstalker. "*That one* was never worthy of a new name."

"I'm not named in honor of Maplefur." Revengeheart's eyes glittered. "I'm named in honor of my mother's plot for vengeance on the clans."

No... Mistybreeze stared at her mate, trembling around her pounding heart as she processed everything she'd just learned. *My clanmates are cold hearted killers... Plotting with a group of murderers! Revengeheart is nothing I ever thought he was...*

"We'll be having kits soon." Revengeheart's tone suddenly softened as she stared at him. "Won't we, Mistybreeze?"

The other cats turned to her, and Mistybreeze's pelt grew hot under their fierce gazes. "I-I don't know..." She stammered.

Ravenfeather studied her. "Having a family is pointless, Revengeheart. Take it from me." His eyes narrowed to amber slits. "She-cats who don't want kits aren't worth wasting time on."

His words struck Mistybreeze like sharp stones. She looked at Revengeheart, but he only returned Ravenfeather's gaze. "She'll be worth it."

Mistybreeze swayed a little on her paws, shivering in the cold damp night. Every hair on her pelt prickled with terror. She suddenly became aware of every cat watching her. Studying her. Waiting for her to protest. Blackstorm whispered something to Foxshadow, while Deserve narrowed his green eyes at her, his claws unsheathing and piercing the earth.

They would kill me... She quickly understood the horrifying reality of the situation she was in. *I know too much. I'm involved in this now. There's no escape. Oh, StarClan, what have I done?*

Revengeheart, the cat she once loved, but now feared, studied her closely. "The clans deserve to suffer for all the pain they've caused my mother. Deserve. All rogues." He narrowed his eyes. "Together, we will destroy them."

Chapter 9

"Good! Now go for his belly!"

Spiderpaw hissed out in pain as Amberpaw pinned his shoulders and raked her hind claws madly across his soft black stomach. He retaliated, pulling a forearm free and slashing open his sister's ear. She shrieked and reared, giving Spiderpaw the opportunity to push her away from him.

"Well done!" Mottledface spoke again, his eyes gleaming as he watched the apprentices re-engage in combat. "Don't give him time to recover. Show no mercy!" Beyond him, Foxshadow paced around the clearing, watching Amberpaw slash at her opponent.

Mistybreeze sat across from them near Revengeheart, her head low. She felt sick to her stomach as she watched the siblings draw blood from one another, as if they were mere rogues. *This is wrong... Everything is so wrong...*

Two days had passed since she had been introduced to Deserve's Army and learned of their horrifying plot. These rogues were responsible for the deaths of her clanmates. Revengeheart and his friends were helping them. And now, she herself was involved in their plan.

She had hardly slept the past few nights; tossing and turning in her nest as she reflected on her terrifying experience in a camp full of killers. She thought desperately about what to do. She could tell Depthstar what she knew. But would he believe her? Would he question Revengeheart and Poisonedsap? Would Revengeheart and his allies go after her? Would the whole of Deserve's Army go after her?

I took an oath to defend this clan with the cost of my life. Mistybreeze shut her eyes, shame washing over her. *And yet I'm afraid... I don't want to die. I don't want to leave Diamondrain and Coldpebble alone. What if Revengeheart and his allies kill them too, because of me?* She

let out a quiet sigh. *What kind of a warrior am I...?*

"That's enough!" Revengeheart's voice snapped her out of her thoughts, and her heart skipped a beat. Amberpaw and Spiderpaw were tangled together, snarling and spitting furiously.

At the white warrior's command, the two sprang apart, and Mistybreeze flinched when she heard the sickening sound of claws ripping from skin. Droplets of blood and tufts of black and ginger fur dotted the grass around them. Spiderpaw trembled, blood trickling from a cut above his eye and glistening through his shoulder fur. Beside him, Amberpaw panted, her eyes alight with acceleration as she twitched her split ear and licked blood from her muzzle.

"Amberpaw, Spiderpaw, well done." Revengeheart meowed. "You'll be a good match for any cat in battle." His eyes narrowed as he swung around. "Falconpaw!"

The dark ginger tabby apprentice was crouched not far from his mentor. He started at his snap and looked up nervously. "Y-yes?"

"You've been a coward long enough." Revengeheart growled. "Attack Spiderpaw."

"But-"

"Now!"

Mistybreeze watched sadly as the apprentice hung his head and slowly headed into the clearing. Spiderpaw straightened and faced his brother while Amberpaw turned and trotted back to Foxshadow, her tail high. He leaned forward and licked blood from her cheek, and she giggled.

"Begin." Revengeheart ordered.

With a growl, Spiderpaw launched himself at Falconpaw, easily knocking him onto his back. Falconpaw batted an unsheathed paw at his brother, who laughed, grinning and revealing his fangs. "What was that?"

Falconpaw has never wanted to be involved with this. Mistybreeze thought sympathetically, remembering how timid he was as a kit. *He's a good cat. He doesn't like violence.* She tensed as Revengeheart let out a frustrated snarl, stalking toward the apprentices.

Spiderpaw quickly backed away, and Revengeheart lunged down, grabbing Falconpaw by the scruff and swinging him around. Mistybreeze held back a gasp as the young apprentice yelped and tumbled in the dirt.

"What are you, a declawed kittypet?" Revengeheart snarled, baring his teeth as Falconpaw stumbled to his paws. "What's wrong with you? Stupid furball!"

Falconpaw's glistening amber eyes flared pleadingly. "I don't want to hurt my brother and sister!" He cried. "No other mentors train their apprentices this way! I don't understand! I just want to be a warrior and hunt and patrol for my clan!"

His words pierced Mistybreeze's heart. She wished she could help him. But like her, his paws had been set onto a dark path. Death would be the only escape. Revengeheart would gladly provide the doorway.

A growl rumbled in Revengeheart's throat as he thrust his muzzle in Falconpaw's face. "You will *never* be a warrior. And you should be grateful! You've been chosen for a bigger destiny, one that none of your dumb clanmates will ever see."

Falconpaw's eyes welled with pain as he backed away and hung his head. "No... I don't want that..." He whimpered.

The cats were quiet for a long moment. Revengeheart exchanged a look with Mottledface. For a heartbeat, Mistybreeze wondered with a spark of hope if they would let Falconpaw go and live the life of a true warrior.

But as Revengeheart's cold eyes locked on his half brother, Mistybreeze knew that had been too much to expect. With a furious snarl, he launched himself at Falconpaw. The apprentice let out a startled shriek as he was pinned by massive black paws.

Mistybreeze leapt to her feet, staring anxiously as the young cat struggled under Revengeheart. *What is he doing? Let him go!*

"You're worthless!" The white tom spat down at him as he dug his claws into his chest. "Don't you get it, you pathetic kit? You were born to fight for us! Otherwise, you might as well run back to the nursery, little Falconkit!"

Falconpaw's amber eyes flashed with protest. "I'm no kit! I-" Before he could finish, Revengeheart swung and ripped his claws across his ear. The young tom let out a cry of pain, glaring up at his mentor in frustration as he went on.

"Maybe you're right. Even as a kit, I had more drive for battle!" Revengeheart sneered. "Perhaps you'd be better off as a kittypet, begging twolegs for food and trotting around with a bell tinkling around your neck!"

"That's not true!" Falconpaw bristled, anger flaring in his gaze as blood ran from a nick in his ear.

Mistybreeze's paws were frozen to the ground as she watched her mate taunt Falconpaw. Beyond them, Mottledface and Foxshadow looked amused, while their apprentices laughed.

"Come on, Falconkit!" Amberpaw sneered. "Too scared to get your paws dirty?"

"Scaredy cat!" Spiderpaw purred. "I bet Depthstar doesn't even give him a warrior name!"

Revengeheart chuckled. "You'll be a nice little kittypet. I think I'd better go tell Poisonedsap right now." He released Falconpaw and turned away. "She'll make sure you find a nice cozy nest to-"

With a screech of fury, Falconpaw got to his paws and lunged for Revengeheart, slamming him to the ground. He raked his claws across his face, leaving scratches welling with blood. To Mistybreeze's surprise, Revengeheart let him continue clawing at him, yowling with rage as he tore up clumps of bloody fur. After a moment, he lunged upward and rolled Falconpaw onto his back,

planting a paw firmly on his throat.

As Falconpaw's eyes flashed upward, Revengeheart swung a black paw at him, tearing his claws across his face. The apprentice screeched out, and Mistybreeze gasped when she saw the long ragged wounds Revengeheart had left on him.

Falconpaw panted as his mentor sneered down at him. "You feel that? Let that rage control you. It's the only way you'll ever be useful in this world." He released the apprentice and turned, padding over to join Mottledface and Foxshadow.

Mistybreeze's stomach twisted as she stared at Revengeheart. *That cat is crazy... How could I have ever loved him or believed a word he said?* She forced her gaze from him and looked at Falconpaw. The apprentice slowly stood, blood trickling down his forehead and across his muzzle from the three long slashes Revengeheart had inflicted. There was no fear or sadness in his eyes. Only cold anger and determination.

Revengeheart is going to change him... There's no doubt about that. Mistybreeze tensed as a horrifying thought crossed her mind. Will he change me too?

"That's enough training for one day." The black legged tom moved his gaze across the apprentices. "Clean yourselves up before you return to camp."

Amberpaw and Spiderpaw turned away, while Falconpaw followed more slowly. A heartbeat later, the bushes rustled, and Mistybreeze turned to see Blackstorm and Swiftstalker emerge.

"Poisonedsap has an idea," Blackstorm announced. "She wanted me to discuss it with the rest of you."

Revengeheart nodded a greeting and stepped forward to meet them. "Alright. What's up?" The cats settled in a circle, leaning close together. Mistybreeze hesitated before joining them. Her stomach twisted nervously as she wondered what horrible scheme Poisonedsap had thought up.

"The clan is suspicious," Blackstorm growled. "They think rogues are responsible for these murders, and that's a little too close for comfort. We need a diversion. A distraction."

Revengeheart nodded slowly. "A scapegoat." His amber eyes gleamed. "Perfect."

"But who?" Mottledface asked. "We can't blame ThunderClan again."

Blackstorm purred. "Poisonedsap knows exactly who. The one cat in ShadowClan that sticks out like a sore paw. The cat that no one's quite sure of."

"Bloodfur. Of course!" Revengeheart laughed. "Yes, he'll do."

Bloodfur? Mistybreeze's eyes widened as alarm shot through her veins. Cats had always acted strangely around her old friend. She figured it was because of his name, but had no proof of this. *Why should he be involved in this mess?*

"W-wait..." Her heart pounded as she found herself speaking, and every cat locked their eyes on her. She grew nervous and conscious of every word she said. "But... Is he the best choice?"

She was answered by silence. Then Swiftstalker spoke up. "There's no reason to involve Bloodfur. We can-"

"Shut up, Swiftstalker." Revengeheart bared his teeth. "Every cat knows you have a soft spot for him, just because you were *kithood friends."* He turned to the others as Swiftstalker dropped his gaze. "It's a plan. We use the clan's distrust in Bloodfur to our advantage." His eyes narrowed. "And I know just how to get started."

Mottledface swished his tail across the grass. "Well?" He prompted.

The white tom cast his friend a look through amber eyes glittering with malice. "I've been thinking about trying to recruit Bloomfire's kits. They might have potential. And you know how attached Bloodfur is to those orange furballs."

"Ah." Foxshadow chuckled. "Triggering Bloodfur while gaining recruits. I like it."

"I'll take care of it tomorrow," Revengeheart meowed. "In the meantime, the rest of you get some rumors spreading about Bloodfur. Make them doubt his loyalty. Make him look suspicious."

"Yes, Revengeheart." Mottledface purred. "We'll get right to it."

Revengeheart nodded approvingly. Mottledface, Foxshadow, Blackstorm, and Swiftstalker headed back toward the camp, leaving he and Mistybreeze alone. She flicked her tail awkwardly, turning to follow the others when he spoke.

"Mistybreeze. Are you ready to have kits yet?"

She stopped in her tracks and stared at him. He studied her calmly. "Don't you want little claws- I mean-" He realized his mistake and snorted in amusement. "*Paws,* running around the nursery?"

"Um..." Mistybreeze didn't know how to respond. The memory of Revengeheart slashing at Falconpaw was fresh in her mind. She wasn't going to risk angering him. "Maybe... In the future."

Revengeheart's eyes narrowed, his tail lashing in irritation. "The near future?"

"Mistybreeze."

She flicked an ear in surprise as Swiftstalker stepped out of the bushes, glancing from her to Revengeheart. "Diamondrain wants to talk to you in camp."

"Oh- okay." Mistybreeze looked at Revengeheart hesitantly. He was glaring at Swiftstalker and grunted, turning and disappearing through the trees.

Thank StarClan... She let out a sigh of relief and turned toward Swiftstalker, and they began padding toward camp side by side.

"Is Diamondrain alright?" Mistybreeze asked worriedly, wondering what her mother could want so urgently.

"Oh, yes." Swiftstalker looked embarrassed. "I'm sorry. I..." He hesitated for a long moment. "I stayed behind to spy on you while

Mottledface, Blackstorm, and Foxshadow returned to camp. I wanted to make sure nothing went wrong."

She blinked at him in surprise. Though it hadn't taken her long to see that Swiftstalker was different from the other cats. He was the only one of their friend group who really felt like a friend. "Thank you."

He flashed her a nervous look. "Just don't tell that to Revengeheart, or any cat."

"I won't. I promise." Mistybreeze assured him. "You can trust me."

Swiftstalker met her gaze, a look of comfort in his blue eyes. "You can trust me, too." She could sense his surprise and relief. *I wonder... Has he been dealing with all of this on his own his whole life? When was the last time he felt he could trust any cat?* As they neared the camp entrance, Mistybreeze found the feeling mutual. *I know I can trust Swiftstalker.*

***

The sun had nearly risen the next day. Mistybreeze sat by the side of the clearing, sharing a mouse with Revengeheart. Sort of. He let her have the leftovers. Her stomach rumbled, but she ignored it. *I'll grab another mouse for myself later.*

Mottledface crouched on the other side of Revengeheart, chewing on a frog leg. He suddenly swallowed and nudged his friend. "Look."

Revengeheart looked up, and Mistybreeze followed his gaze. Two of Bloomfire's kits, Cardinalpaw and Applepaw, were hanging around the apprentice's den, chatting loudly.

"I wonder what Bloodfur's going to show me today!" Cardinalpaw purred excitedly, his tail high in the air.

Applepaw waved her tail. "Copperstripe said he'd show me some hunting techniques. I want to catch a frog!"

Mistybreeze's heart sank as Revengeheart smiled and rose to his paws, crossing the clearing to meet the apprentices. *Why can't you*

leave them alone? She silently pleaded. *They have nothing to do with this. They're innocent young cats who just want to be warriors!*

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Swiftstalker's black pelt as he joined her and Mottledface. He stared after his brother in dismay. "Oh no..." He murmured.

"Do you two want to learn from a *real* warrior?" Revengeheart prompted as he reached the apprentices. They turned to him curiously. "How about a little warm up lesson?"

"Really?" Cardinalpaw exchanged an excited look with Applepaw. "Sure!"

Revengeheart raised a black paw. "How about some battle moves? Come at me, one of you."

While Cardinalpaw hesitated, Applepaw let out a playful growl and lunged forward, swiping a sheathed paw at his white chest. Mistybreeze flinched, waiting for Revengeheart to criticize her poor skills.

But instead, he praised her. "Good job, Applepaw!" He raised his other paw and swiped his claws through the air at an invisible opponent. "And you always go for the throat or belly. That's a quick finisher."

Cardinalpaw tilted his head. "Isn't it against the warrior code to kill an enemy?"

"Not if the enemy deserves it!" Revengeheart retorted. "Now dodge this!" He swiped an unsheathed paw at Cardinalpaw.

"Hey!"

Mistybreeze froze as a familiar dark red tabby charged across the clearing and planted himself between his apprentice and Revengeheart, glaring at him. "What do you think you're doing."

Bloodfur. Her heart felt like a stone in her body. *He loves his siblings.* Of course he would defend them, no question. Revengeheart's plan was working.

Revengeheart blinked, look of puzzled innocence on his face. "I'm showing them battle moves, Bloodfur. Keep your fur on." He returned his attention to the apprentices. "So when you lash out-"

"Your claws were unsheathed," Bloodfur growled. "You're going to hurt them."

This is nothing. If you'd seen what I saw yesterday... Her thoughts trailed off as she saw that many cats were beginning to notice the two warriors arguing. Copperstripe and Timberstorm sat by the warriors den, while Brownstripe and Cliffshade murmured to each other, casting wary looks at Bloodfur. But he seemed oblivious to his surroundings. *Oh no...*

"They'll learn quicker if they get hurt," Revengeheart responded. "What's the use of training with sheathed claws?" He reached out with one paw and pushed Bloodfur aside. "Cardinalpaw, attack your sister and-"

A few cats gasped as Bloodfur shouldered Revengeheart back. "Don't tell him what to do!" He snarled, his red striped tail lashing angrily. "Cardinalpaw is *my* apprentice, not *yours!"*

Mistybreeze had never seen Bloodfur so angry. The dark red warrior's yellow eyes blazed with fury as he faced Revengeheart. She sat up, exchanging a nervous look with Swiftstalker.*Come on, Bloodfur!* She silently begged. *Don't fall for this! Wake up and realize everyone's watching!*

But it was too late. Revengeheart knew exactly how to trigger Bloodfur. His black tipped tail swished slowly as he smirked. "That's a shame. Cardinalpaw deserves a better mentor than you."

At that moment, Bloodfur snarled furiously and lunged at Revengeheart. *No!* She watched helplessly as the two toms screeched and clawed at each other. She had never seen Bloodfur fight so fiercely, dragging his claws across Revengeheart's body. The white tom quickly submitted to his attacks, and she understood. *He's making it look like he's the victim. Making Bloodfur look more like the monster he isn't...*

Though she knew very well that he wasn't to blame, the sight of her old friend fighting so mercilessly stunned her. *This isn't him. Revengeheart is bringing out the worst in him.* The clan had quickly crowded around the brawling toms, meowing anxiously.

"Stop at once!" Ashcloud yowled.

Bloomfire leaped to her paws. "Bloodfur!"

"Hey!" Hissed Copperstripe. "Stop!"

Bloodfur had Revengeheart pinned now, glaring down at him angrily. He raised a paw to strike him again when Depthstar yowled.

"Bloodfur!"

At last, he snapped out of it and glared up at the clan leader. Depthstar looked furious and stunned. "What's wrong with you? Get off him, now!" As Bloodfur obeyed, Revengeheart got to his paws and prepared to leap at Bloodfur again. Mistybreeze realized he'd become just as blinded by his anger.

"You too, Revengeheart!" Depthstar hissed, and Revengeheart stopped. "What are you thinking? Clanmates do *not* fight each other!"

Bloodfur panted and glared at Revengeheart. "He was showing the apprentices-"

"I don't care what he was doing!" Depthstar cut him off angrily. "It doesn't give you the right to draw blood from your clanmate! And *you* shouldn't provoke him!" He added to Revengeheart. "You two are warriors now! And you, Bloodfur, a mentor! What kind of example are you setting for your apprentice?"

Bloodfur's ears flattened shamefully as he looked at Cardinalpaw. His gaze drifted across the clearing, just noticing the crowd around him. He caught Mistybreeze's gaze, and she could only stare back wordlessly. *I'm sorry...*

As Depthstar proceeded to punish Revengeheart and Bloodfur with

apprentice duties, Swiftstalker turned to her, his blue eyes dull with sadness. "I didn't think he'd do it..." He murmured. "I didn't think it was in him."

And yet it is... Mistybreeze stared at Bloodfur as he slowly headed for the medicine den, his ears flattened as the clan murmured about him. *And Revengeheart is going to bring out every piece of darkness inside him.*

Chapter 10

Frogs croaked occasionally in the night as Mistybreeze followed Revengeheart and Mottledface through the forest. She blinked away sleep as the cool night air chilled her fur. Revengeheart had prodded her awake and nudged her out of her nest without warning. The ShadowClan cats allying with Deserve were meeting in the forest. *What horrible scheme could this be about?* She wondered miserably.

When the three reached a small clearing, half hidden by bushes and pine trees, many other cats already sat waiting. Blackstorm and Foxshadow sat like dark statues in the black night.

Poisonedsap sat on a fallen log, hunched over as she studied her allies. Her amber eyes glinted in the shadows. As Revengeheart led Mistybreeze and Mottledface into the clearing, she moved her attention to them. "Where's Swiftstalker and the apprentices?" She growled.

"They're coming." Revengeheart dipped his head respectfully as he sat down close to his mother. Mistybreeze awkwardly sat beside him, looking over her shoulder nervously.

The cats had been very careful about sneaking out. After one group of cats left the camp, the next group would wait a few moments as to not look suspicious. Though every other cat in the clan was asleep, they couldn't make a lot of noise to wake anyone or alert the guards.

Foxshadow swished his fluffy tail. "They'd better not be much longer." He grumbled. "I want to sleep before-"

Poisonedsap growled, and the dark tom fell silent. *These cats have so much respect for her.* Mistybreeze thought. *More respect than they do for Depthstar! Do they really want to help her destroy the clans? What's in it for them?*

It wasn't long before Swiftstalker arrived. He was followed by the three apprentices. Mistybreeze's heart sunk when she saw the stone cold look in Falconpaw's eyes. *You could have been a loyal warrior. You could have been happy. But Revengeheart has convinced you that hate and anger is the only way to live.*

"What kept you, Swiftstalker?" Poisonedsap studied her son suspiciously.

Swiftstalker sat beside Mistybreeze and lifted his chin as he responded. "You don't want us getting caught, do you? We had to take our time."

Amberpaw rolled her eyes. "Heatpaw rolled over in his sleep and into my nest!" She scowled in disgust. "Right on my leg! It wasn't easy to get away without waking that orange furball."

"I see." Poisonedsap dismissed her daughter with a flick of her tail. When she was sure she had every cat's attention, she raised her voice. "First thing's first. Revengeheart." She gave him a nod. "You did very well in the fight earlier."

"Yes!" Foxshadow chuckled. "Every cat looked at Bloodfur like he was a case of green-cough! Like he was a badger ready to strike."

The golden she-cat nodded as a twisted grin spread across her face. "And that's exactly what we want. The clan is quickly seeing the monster that Hawkfeather prophesized."

Hawkfeather? Prophecy? Mistybreeze's ears pricked with curiosity. *What is she talking about?*

Spiderpaw and Amberpaw were exchanging confused looks as Poisonedsap went on. "Bloodfur has a darkness inside him that can be used to our advantage. We saw that today when Revengeheart angered him."

"So?" Blackstorm prompted. "We should pick on Bloomfire's kits more often?"

"Wrong." Poisonedsap narrowed her eyes. "That was only a test. I've had an idea, but first I needed to see how Bloodfur reacted to

Revengeheart's insult." A purr rumbled in her throat. "It's very clear to me now just how much Bloodfur wants to be accepted by his clanmates. How much he wants to prove himself. He doesn't understand why they've always treated him so strangely. That frustration and pain can easily be converted into hatred." She smiled. "Now I know this will work."

The cats looked at each other thoughtfully as Poisonedsap rose to her paws. "I've thought long and hard about our next steps. And it's very simple, so long as we control what happens afterwards." Her eyes glittered in the darkness as she spoke. "It's time for Bloodfur to learn the truth about his birth."

While Blackstorm and Foxshadow's eyes lit with excitement, Poisonedsap went on. "It's up to us to make sure he focuses on his anger and hatred."

What truth about his birth? Mistybreeze felt completely lost at Poisonedsap's words. She looked at Revengeheart, then turned to Swiftstalker, who looked just as puzzled. *There's a big secret about Bloodfur? This must be the reason every cat acts so strangely around him!*

"What do you mean?" Swiftstalker stared at his mother, genuine confusion in his eyes. "What about his birth?"

Amberpaw spoke up as well. "Yeah, what's the big secret? Wasn't he born like the rest of us?"

"Oh, yes." Poisonedsap looked mildly amused. "Some of you don't know the truth about Bloodfur. You were too young or not even born yet when it happened."

Mistybreeze's heart pounded as she awaited Poisonedsap's next words. What could be such a dark secret?

"Flameheart and Bloomfire are not Bloodfur's parents," The dark golden she-cat meowed, her voice like claws dragging across stone. "His real mother bled to death giving birth, and his father served himself up as fox food."

"Sick!" Spiderpaw exclaimed, and Amberpaw shushed him.

Mistybreeze couldn't hold back a sharp gasp, and Revengeheart shot her a glare. She shrank back under his gaze, but continued staring at Poisonedsap in shock. *I can't believe it! Poor Bloodfur...*

"Hawkfeather thought the blood covered kit was an omen from StarClan," Poisonedsap went on. "He declared that Bloodkit would destroy ShadowClan."

While Mistybreeze's heart sank with pity, Revengeheart broke into laughter. "And the clan believed something so stupid?"

"You know how silly clan cats are about their precious StarClan," Poisonedsap snorted.

Amberpaw raised her voice. "Here's what I think of StarClan!" She dropped onto her chest and raised her tail, wiggling her rump at the stars. Spiderpaw and Falconpaw broke into laughter, and Revengeheart couldn't even resist a chuckle.

"Right, Amberpaw." Poisonedsap's eyes gleamed. "Though every cat agreed to keep the secret about his parents, they don't trust him. They're waiting for the day Bloodfur turns on them." She dug her claws into the bark under her. "And that day is coming... Very soon."

Revengeheart nodded slowly. "The clan will hold him responsible for our crimes without question."

They're really going to do this to Bloodfur? Mistybreeze's heart ached. *He's already struggling so much. He doesn't deserve to learn the truth about his parents like this, or be framed for murder!* She glanced aside at Swiftstalker and saw dull sorrow in his blue eyes. *He doesn't like this either. I know he still cares about Bloodfur... Just like I do, despite what he said to me and Coldpebble.*

"The next killings," Poisonedsap announced, breaking Mistybreeze out of her thoughts. "We will pin them on Bloodfur." She nodded to Revengeheart. "Ravenfeather and Clovernose are meeting with Castiel later tonight just outside RiverClan territory. I want you and

Mottledface to join them and ask Castiel when his next attack on ShadowClan will be."

"Yes, Poisonedsap." Revengeheart's eyes gleamed.

"We need more deaths as soon as possible, while the memory of Bloodfur attacking you is fresh in their minds." Poisonedsap purred. "Then the fun begins."

"Right." The black legged tom stood and looked at Mottledface. "We'd better leave for RiverClan territory now if we want to make it in time." He shouldered Mistybreeze, startling her to her paws. "Come on."

She reluctantly turned away when Poisonedsap spoke. "Wait. Before you go, I'd like to have a word with Mistybreeze."

Unease prickled her fur. *Me? Why me?* She turned toward Poisonedsap as Revengeheart hesitated, his eyes narrowed. "Fine." He muttered. "We'll wait for you."

Why do I have to go with you to meet Castiel? Mistybreeze wondered. *Must I be by your side at all times? What sort of mate does this?*

As Revengeheart and Mottledface moved away, Poisonedsap stalked toward her. She tensed as the queen watched her through gleaming amber slits. "Hello, Mistybreeze."

"Poisonedsap." She forced her fur to lay flat as she dipped her head respectfully. It was quiet for a moment. Crickets chirped in the undergrowth. Mistybreeze shuffled her paws nervously. *What does she want to talk about?*

At last, Poisonedsap spoke. "Are you expecting kits, Mistybreeze?" Her voice lacked any emotion.

Unease shot through her as she stared back at the queen. Her tongue felt dry as she gave a simple response. "N-no."

"Well, how long until you are?" Poisonedsap's tail twitched impatiently. "You and Revengeheart have been mates for moons."

"I..." Mistybreeze swallowed, her mind spinning for an answer. She forced herself to meet Poisonedsap's gaze. *She's a horrible cat... She truly is. But... Maybe she'll understand that I don't want kits. She-cat to she-cat. She could understand, couldn't she?* She lifted her chin bravely as she spoke. "I-I'm not sure if I want any kits."

For a long moment, Poisonedsap said nothing. She only stared back at her with an unreadable look in her eyes. At last, she spoke. "Well, that had better change soon." As Mistybreeze's heart sank in disappointment, the she-cat brushed past her, whisking her ragged tail around her neck. "I'd really like grandkits, you know." She chuckled.

Mistybreeze looked over her shoulder and watched warily as Poisonedsap headed toward Revengeheart and Mottledface. "I'm done with Mistybreeze if you want to leave now." She paused and leaned close to Revengeheart, murmuring in his ear. When she finished speaking, he raised his head and glared past her at Mistybreeze.

She told him what I said! Panic flashed through Mistybreeze, and she froze, waiting for Revengeheart to confront her.

But instead, the white tom only lashed his tail at her. "Come on," He growled. "We're going to meet Castiel." He and Mottledface headed through the trees, and Mistybreeze had no choice but to follow.

***

The moon had changed position in the sky by the time Mistybreeze and the others reached the outskirts of RiverClan territory. Revengeheart quickened his pace. "There they are."

Up ahead, Mistybreeze saw the dark silhouettes of five cats. Two of them were Ravenfeather, the RiverClan deputy, and his clanmate, Clovernose. Opposite of them were Castiel, Papercut, and Wolf.

All five cats bristled at the newcomers, claws flashing out, but quickly relaxed when they recognized the ShadowClan warriors.

"Revengeheart." Castiel greeted him, though the surprise was clear

in his voice.

"What are you doing here?" Ravenfeather demanded. "This is RiverClan business."

When the ShadowClan cats joined them, Revengeheart dipped his head. "I'm sorry for intruding, Castiel," He meowed. "Poisonedsap has requested that Deserve launch another attack on ShadowClan territory as soon as possible."

Castiel narrowed his blue eyes. "Why can't it wait?"

"ShadowClan is growing suspicious," Revengeheart replied. "Poisonedsap plans to frame one of our clanmates for the murders to keep them off our tails."

The silver tabby nodded slowly. "Very well." He looked over his shoulder. "Papercut, will you lead an attack on ShadowClan next moon?"

Before the white tom could respond, Mottledface butt in. "Next moon? That's-"

"The best we can do." Castiel fixed the brown tom with a firm stare. "Ravenfeather has asked us to launch two attacks within the moon. You'll have to wait."

"Very well," Revengeheart meowed, shooting Mottledface a glare. "Thank you, Castiel."

He was about to turn away when Castiel spoke again. "Will Brownstripe be on many patrols?"

"Brownstripe?" Revengeheart glanced over his shoulder, his tail twitching in confusion. "Probably. Why?"

Mistybreeze felt her stomach twist as Castiel responded. "Perfect," He purred smoothly. "Then Deserve himself will participate. He and Brownstripe have... unfinished business."

After the ShadowClan cats said their goodbyes and began the journey back to ShadowClan territory, Mistybreeze couldn't get

Castiel's words out of her head. It was painfully clear that the next of her clanmates to fall to Deserve's claws was Brownstripe.

And he won't be the only one. Mistybreeze felt sick to her stomach, her tail low and dragging behind her. *Who else is doomed to suffer the same fate?*

Chapter 11

The sun shone brightly in the pale sky, a soft breeze wafting through the pine branches. Mistybreeze sat between Revengeheart and Mottledface in the shade of the thorn barrier, quietly grooming her silver fur.

"Hey, Boost!"

She flicked an ear at Coldpebble's voice and looked up. Her brother was crouched by the fresh kill pile, tugging a mouse toward him by it's tail. "Want to share this with me?" He offered. "It's the last one."

The fresh kill pile was certainly low. After Coldpebble claimed the mouse, all that remained was a couple day old frogs. Boost had been sniffing at one of them hesitantly. Mistybreeze guessed that the prey caught this morning had already been given to the only queen, Greenpine, and the elders.

"Sure. Thanks!" Boost blinked gratefully and moved to Coldpebble's side.

As the two toms took turns nibbling at the mouse, the clan deputy, Cobratail, padded toward them, giving the fresh-kill pile a look of disapproval. "I'm sending out a few hunting patrols," He announced, raising his voice so the other cats in the clearing could hear him. "Are there any volunteers?"

Coldpebble swallowed and looked up from the mouse. "Can I lead one?" He asked brightly.

The clan deputy frowned. "Didn't you lead the dawn patrol?"

"Well, yes." The dark silver tom looked embarrassed. "But I'd be happy to lead another."

His former mentor, Song, walked by and purred, flicking him on the

shoulder with her tail. "You are a great hunter, Coldpebble. Every hunting patrol could use you."

"Very true." Cobratail's amber eyes gleamed. "Very well, Coldpebble, you may lead a patrol. Boost, Song, why don't you join him?"

The two warriors looked ready to go. "Great!" Song meowed. "I'll fetch Stripednose. I'm sure he'd love to come."

As the white she-cat ran across the clearing to the warriors' den, Mistybreeze stared at her brother, standing proudly between Cobratail and Boost. *Coldpebble is so lucky to be... Free. I'd like to go hunting.* Her heart sank with disappointment. *But Revengeheart won't let me go anywhere without him.*

She cast a careful look at the white warrior, who observed the camp like a fox studying it's prey. *Nothing about this is right. I shouldn't be treated this way by my own mate. I shouldn't be forced to follow Poisonedsap's plot. But what choice do I have?*

As Coldpebble led his patrol out of the camp, Cobratail spoke again. "We'll need another hunting patrol. Diamondrain, will you lead it?"

Mistybreeze saw her mother by the nursery, speaking to Greenpine. When her name was spoken, she flicked her ears forward and turned to the deputy. "Of course, Cobratail." She waved her tail in farewell to Greenpine as she headed to the center of the clearing.

Not far from Mistybreeze, Blackstorm exchanged a look with Foxshadow. "Me and Foxshadow will go," Blackstorm meowed, rising to his paws. He looked over at his brother. "Brownstripe, care to join us?"

The tabby warrior blinked warmly. "Sure."

Dread dropped like a hard stone in Mistybreeze's stomach. At once she understood. A moon had passed since the night she and the others had met with Castiel. They'd agreed to launch an attack on another ShadowClan patrol. *And Deserve wants Brownstripe on it... He's going to kill him.* Her heart sank as she watched Brownstripe start toward Blackstorm. *And he completely trusts his brother... How*

can Blackstorm send his own brother to his death?

"Brownstripe! Brownstripe! Wait!"

Tinypaw echoed Mistybreeze's thoughts as she bounded across the clearing, her tail high in the air. Brownstripe turned to his daughter and let out a purr. "What is it?"

"I forgot to tell you! Crowmask is going to teach me a new hunting move today." Her eyes shone excitedly. "The one you said I'd learn when I was older."

Brownstripe's eyes gleamed with pride. "That's great! I can't wait for you to show me later." He touched his nose to her head.

As Tinypaw purred and spun to find Crowmask, Mistybreeze stared after her, her heart heavy as a boulder in her chest. *They have no idea... That's the last thing they'll say to each other...*

"Is every cat ready?" Diamondrain asked. Brownstripe and Blackstorm nodded, while Foxshadow swished his tail.

Mistybreeze's pelt prickled with unease at seeing her mother so close to Poisonedsap's allies. *Is Diamondrain in danger?* She wondered uneasily. She couldn't resist turning to Revengeheart. "Will Diamondrain be okay?" She whispered.

Her mate didn't respond for a moment. "Probably." He shrugged. "Deserve has no interest in her." He rolled onto his side. "I think I have a burr in my fur. Will you find it?"

That's all you have to say? Mistybreeze held her tongue and turned, pawing through his white fur. She tried to find comfort in Revengeheart's words. *He's right. Diamondrain doesn't matter to Deserve or this plan in any way... She'll be fine...*

***

The day felt painfully long. The sun seemed to never move. As Mistybreeze lay beside Revengeheart, she fought away dark thoughts. She was alert, unconsciously listening for distant screeches and wails as Brownstripe met his demise. *I could have*

*done something... S*he thought miserably. *I could have warned him...* She felt like she was going to be sick.

"I need to use the dirtplace." She rose to her paws, not even waiting for Revengeheart's answer. She felt nauseous as she made her way across the clearing and slipped into the bushes that guarded the dirtplace.

She let out a sigh. *I'm so worried about Diamondrain... What if Revengeheart is wrong?* She scraped at the ground with her forepaw before preparing to make dirt.

"Psst!"

Mistybreeze nearly jumped out of her fur. She dropped her tail and spun, shocked to see Swiftstalker ducking into the bushes with her. "Hey- occupied!" She gasped.

"Sorry!" Swiftstalker ducked his head in embarrassment as he sat in front of her, casting a nervous look over his shoulder. "This is the only place a cat can get any privacy from Revengeheart."

That was certainly true. Mistybreeze lowered her head. "What is it?"

"Today is the day Poisonedsap is going to reveal the truth about Bloodfur." Swiftstalker whispered, his blue eyes lit with worry. "What do we do?"

She dropped her gaze. "What *can* we do?" She murmured. "We're powerless against her. Maybe it won't be so bad-"

"I lost my friendship with Bloodfur a long time ago." Swiftstalker spoke quietly. "But I still care about him. I know you do, too. The only reason we can't be his friends is because of Poisonedsap and Revengeheart."

Mistybreeze hesitated, and he went on. "We'll beat Poisonedsap to it. We'll go into the forest and tell Bloodfur right now."

"What??" Her eyes widened in shock. "Are you crazy?"

"It's better he hears it from us," Swiftstalker argued, his eyes lit with

sadness. "We'll help him through it, and he'll be prepared for Poisonedsap's attack. It's the least we can do, Mistybreeze. It's *all* we can do."

Mistybreeze considered his words in silence. *Swiftstalker is right... We can at least prepare Bloodfur and make this easier on him.* She gave a slow nod. "Alright." She murmured.

The black and white tom immediately stood. "Come on. Let's go find him." They emerged from the dirtplace quickly, glancing around to be sure no cat had spotted them leaving together. The two of them scanned the clearing for Bloodfur's red tabby pelt.

"Besides, it'll be good for the apprentices to practice together." Cobratail was meowing. Mistybreeze looked toward the deputy and froze. Bloodfur stood with his back to them, Cardinalpaw at his side. Cougarfoot, Crowmask, and Tinypaw were with them, ready to go. Cobratail gave the cats a nod and turned away.

As the patrol left the camp and Bloodfur disappeared from sight, Mistybreeze exchanged a defeated look with Swiftstalker. *Unless there's time... Bloodfur is on his own...*

***

The sun was setting now. Mistybreeze spent the rest of the afternoon worrying about Brownstripe, Diamondrain, and now Bloodfur. *Why should I be worried about him?* She wondered miserably. *After the way he treated me and Coldpebble, I shouldn't care.*

Movement by the thorn tunnel caught her attention, and she looked up to see Foxshadow and Blackstorm entering the camp, each carrying a frog. Her stomach twisted. Two cats were missing.

Cobratail noticed their return and approached them as they deposited their prey on the fresh kill pile. "Where are Diamondrain and Brownstripe?" He sounded puzzled.

When Blackstorm didn't reply, Foxshadow spoke up. "We decided to split up. They went to hunt by the marsh, while we stayed near the

border."

Oh, StarClan... Mistybreeze swallowed. *Why didn't Diamondrain return with them?* She stared at the two dark warriors, but they gave nothing away. *They must know if she and Brownstripe are dead... No... She can't be...* She shut her eyes. *Oh StarClan, I know I'm a horrible warrior, but please, let Diamondrain be okay...*

***

Stars began to appear in the darkening sky. With every passing moment, Mistybreeze felt more and more certain that something horrible had happened to her mother. Not far from her, Swiftstalker sat, his eyes glittering with fear. *Is he worried for Brownstripe and Diamondrain?* She wondered. *Or Bloodfur?*

Startled yowls rose from the cats around them, and Mistybreeze looked up. She thought she had been prepared for the worst. But what she saw before her was something she could never have begun to imagine.

No...

Cougarfoot led the way through the camp, carrying the limp body of Brownstripe on his shoulders. But Mistybreeze barely noticed. Her wide, stunned eyes were locked on Crowmask. The black warrior followed Cougarfoot slowly, his head low and ears flattened. Across his back, he carried the familiar silver body of Diamondrain.

As Crowmask lowered Diamondrain's body to the ground beside Brownstripe's, time seemed to stand still. Mistybreeze couldn't speak or breathe. Her heart pounded in her ears as she stared at the body from a distance. "No..." She choked out, and reality sunk in.

"No..." She let out a cry and shot forward, racing through the crowd of alarmed cats. "Oh, no!" Crowmask stepped back when she neared. She let out a wail of grief when she reached her mother. She stared at the massive wound in her belly, blood knotting her fur.

At that same moment, Coldpebble appeared at her side, letting out a sob of pain. "No..."

Mistybreeze trembled as she sank onto her belly and pressed her nose into Diamondrain's soft fur, drinking in her scent. The warm, familiar scent that had made her feel safe as a kit. "Who did this?" She cried her thoughts out loud. *Deserve? Castiel? Foxshadow, or Blackstorm?*

She heard Depthstar yowl faintly, but didn't care to listen as she pressed her head into her mother's body. *Diamondrain... I'm so sorry... This is my fault...* She shut her eyes and let out a muffled cry into her fur. *I could have warned you... I could have done something, and I didn't.* She felt cold and numb, her heart shattered like ice.

"But what rogues do we have problems with? I can't think of any." As Depthstar continued speaking, she shifted closer to Coldpebble. He let out a quiet whimper.

"Depthstar, it brings me great grief to suggest this, but... Have you thought of looking to your own cats?"

Mistybreeze opened her eyes at Poisonedsap's voice. She raised her head slightly, peering over Diamondrain's flank. The golden she-cat had stood, her ears flattened as she looked up at Depthstar. *She's going to accuse Bloodfur.*

She spotted Swiftstalker beyond his mother, his blue eyes flashing with worry. He caught her eye, but she dropped her gaze. I'm sorry, Swiftstalker. My mother is dead. I could care less if Bloodfur's feelings get hurt.

Depthstar bristled from atop the meeting rock. "Which ShadowClan warrior would do such a thing?"

"Who do you think, Depthstar?" Poisonedsap's amber eyes glittered. "Which cat has always been an outcast? Which cat was absent from camp before the bodies were found?" She dragged her gaze across the clearing. "Which cat did Hawkfeather warn us about?"

Mistybreeze realized that Poisonedsap's gaze had fallen on Bloodfur,

who began bristling in shock as the entire clan turned to him. *Bloodfur* was *absent from camp while Diamondrain was... What if...*

As the clan began meowing anxiously to one another, Poisonedsap went on. "Bloodfur never liked his mentor! And it's clear he dislikes Revengeheart! I'll bet he killed Diamondrain just to hurt his mate, Mistybreeze!"

Mistybreeze was startled to hear her name spoken. Though she knew this was all a part of the plan, in her state of grief, Poisonedsap's words made sense. *What if Bloodfur is still angry at me and Coldpebble? Would he go this far to hurt us again?* She saw Coldpebble staring at Bloodfur in shock. *Does he believe this?*

Grief and fear washed over her as the camp erupted into chaos. The warriors screeched insults and howled their anger at Bloodfur, who they had closed in on. The dark red tabby looked terrified, his fur ruffled and yellow eyes lit with fear as he crouched like a vulnerable kit.

What if it's all true? What if he has been causing trouble of his own? "Did you do this?" Mistybreeze raised her trembling voice in a cry as she stared at her former friend. "Did you kill my mother?"

Bloodfur met her gaze, his eyes blazing with desperation. "No! I-" He was cut off when Crowmask leaped in front of him, snarling angrily.

"Bloodfur wouldn't..." Mistybreeze could hardly hear Coldpebble's rasp among the yowls and hisses around her. "Would he...?"

"I... I don't know." She swallowed. "I-"

"Get out of my way, Flameheart!" Crowmask yowled, and Mistybreeze saw that the ginger tabby had rushed to shield his foster son. "That cat is a murderer!"

"No, he isn't!" Flameheart hissed defiantly. "You won't lay a claw on him!"

Poisonedsap raised her voice in a sneer. "Hawkfeather warned us about him! The kit born in blood couldn't have been anything but a

bad omen!"

She's saying it. She's going to reveal everything to Bloodfur. She peered through the crowd and saw Revengeheart watching the chaos, his amber eyes gleaming with excitement. While Mottledface and Foxshadow looked amused, Swiftstalker stared at his paws.

"My son is innocent!" Flameheart bared his teeth, shouldering Crowmask away.

"Stop that nonsense, Flameheart!" Poisonedsap spoke louder than ever, making sure every cat could hear her. "He's not your son! You were a fool to take in that kit! He was a sign of trouble since the start!"

Bloodfur froze, his yellow eyes wide and bewildered. "What's she talking about?"

"Enough!" Depthstar screeched, and he was answered by silence. "This is madness! There's no evidence that Bloodfur killed those cats."

"Everything Poisonedsap said makes perfect sense to me!" Crowmask growled.

Ashcloud nodded, his eyes narrowed to slits. "He's a murderer and he'll destroy our clan! We should have listened to Hawkfeather."

Depthstar snarled down at the shaken clan. "Silence! Bloodfur is innocent until proven guilty! No cat will harm him. Is that understood?"

The cats slowly backed off of Bloodfur, glaring at him and whispering to one another. She stared as Bloomfire and Flameheart spoke to Bloodfur. He looked shaken. After a moment, Flameheart turned away, and Bloodfur slowly followed him out of the camp. *They have a lot to talk about...*

Mistybreeze let out a shaky sigh and pressed her nose back into Diamondrain's fur. *I don't smell Bloodfur's scent on her...*

On the meeting rock, Depthstar was silent for a long moment, as if

processing what had just happened. After a while, he spoke again, his voice dry and tired. "We will hold a vigil for Diamondrain and Brownstripe."

"What about Bloodfur?" Crowmask demanded. "Are we going to let him get away with this?"

"You let him leave the camp alone with Flameheart!" Copperstripe pointed out worriedly. "He'll be next."

Bloomfire leaped to her paws and glared at the golden tom. "Don't say such a thing! Bloodfur would never kill any cat, especially his own father!"

Cliffshade twitched his tail. "But Flameheart *isn't* his father. We all know that."

"Enough!" Depthstar hissed, and the clan quieted, glaring up at him. "There will be no more talk of Bloodfur tonight. We're going to pay our respects to our fallen clanmates. Is that clear?"

Several cats muttered in disapproval, but no cat openly objected. The clan leader continued, his blue eyes dull with grief. "Brownstripe was my son. I was not prepared to lose another kit before his time. He was brave, loyal, and strong." He looked down at Brownstripe's body. His daughters, Tinypaw, Creampaw, and Honeypaw huddled around him. "I see him in his kits every day. I hope he hunts with Snakekit, Sunflower, and Rosebreeze in StarClan."

"I mentored him." Greenpine meowed solemnly. "He was a quick learner."

"I love and miss him so much already," Creampaw whispered, staring at her father numbly. "I hope to see you when I visit the Moonstone next moon. You'll be glad to be with Rosebreeze again."

It was quiet for a long moment. Stars glittered in the night sky. Depthstar spoke quietly. "Mistybreeze? Coldpebble? Would either of you like to speak for Diamondrain?"

Coldpebble looked to Mistybreeze, who shook her head. She was

too devastated to talk. She didn't deserve to speak for her mother. *I played a role in her death... What right to I have to speak?*

Her brother rose to his paws and stared down at his mother sadly. "Diamondrain was a great mother." He murmured. "She taught us to be the best warriors we could be. To follow our hearts and protect our clan."

And I failed... Mistybreeze's heart swelled with pain.

"I like to think I inherited her hunting skills," Coldpebble went on. "So... So every piece of prey I bring back, you can thank Diamondrain for." He sat down quietly while the clan murmured to one another, praising his words.

The clan quietly dispersed, leaving the kin of Diamondrain and Brownstripe to grieve in silence. The night air grew chilly, but Mistybreeze didn't care. She remained by her mother's side, her heart heavy in her chest.

She saw a white pelt out of the corner of her eye and glanced up. Revengeheart stood a few fox lengths away, watching her in silence. For a heartbeat, she wondered if he was going to come over and comfort her. But he turned away, twitching his tail before disappearing through the thorn tunnel. *Where is he going?* She miserably leaned against Coldpebble, longing to feel comforted. Her brother turned and rested his chin over her head.

"I'm sorry."

A cat spoke quietly. As Coldpebble lifted his head, Mistybreeze looked over, her heart skipping a beat in surprise.

Their father, Crowmask, stood near them, clearly keeping his distance. But he was closer than he'd ever been before. *Is he really talking to us?* Mistybreeze wondered. *He's never said a word to us...*

Crowmask's black pelt was hardly visible in the night. The normally sharp tongued warrior seemed... Different. His amber eyes were dull with an emotion Mistybreeze had never seen there before.

As she and Coldpebble stared, Crowmask hesitated. "She... She

loved you both. She's with StarClan now." He paused for a long moment, looking down. "I never wanted kits." He murmured, his voice distant as he spoke. "But Diamondrain did, more than anything. That's why when I found out she was expecting, I... didn't want to be her mate anymore. I'm not a father. I'm a warrior."

At last, Mistybreeze understood why their father had been absent from their lives. She wasn't sure she liked his reasoning. But at least she knew now.

When neither cat responded, Crowmask looked away, flattening his ears. "I don't expect you to forgive me. But know that I'm sorry I'm not the father you deserved." After a moment, he awkwardly turned away.

Mistybreeze stared after him before exchanging a solemn look with Coldpebble. *We never needed a father. Diamondrain was more than enough for us.*

"May I join you?" Dewstorm emerged from the medicine den, watching them sadly. Diamondrain had been his sister. Mistybreeze nodded, and the spotted tom settled beside Coldpebble, resting his chin on his sister's head.

After a long while of silence, Coldpebble rasped. "Who did this, Dewstorm? Will StarClan tell you?"

The medicine cat shook his head. "StarClan doesn't tell me everything."

I know who did this. Mistybreeze's thoughts darkened with anger and grief. *Revengeheart... Deserve... Poisonedsap... They're all responsible.* She slowly rose to her paws on newly found strength.

"Mistybreeze?" Coldpebble looked up at her.

"I-I just need some air." She looked away. "I'll be back." She felt numb as she headed through the thorn tunnel into the dark forest. She drank in the cool night air, picking up Revengeheart's scent. *He went this way.* She narrowed her eyes, swallowing back a lump in her throat.

They've caused every death... And now my mother... Fury blazed through her.

She padded over the damp earth on trembling paws, rounding a tree. *Where is he?* She was about to push her way between two bushes when a cat emerged, stumbling into her roughly. She recognized Revengeheart's amber eyes immediately. "Mistybreeze?" He growled. "What-"

She didn't think about what she was doing. And she didn't care about the consequences. "Did you do this?" She shrieked, trembling in anger and grief. "Did you have them kill my mother?"

Claws stung across her muzzle before she had time to react. She stumbled backwards and fell onto her side, staring up as Revengeheart loomed over her furiously. "Shut up!" He snarled, planting an unsheathed black paw on her shoulder and pushing her to the ground. "Question me again, and Coldpebble is next!"

Mistybreeze's anger faded into hot fear, and she choked out a sob of grief. *He did! He caused this!*

"There's no backing out, Mistybreeze!" Revengeheart leaned over her and bared his teeth. "You're going to help us destroy the clans and have my kits." He narrowed his glowing amber eyes to slits. "Or I will kill you and every cat you care about. Don't you dare forget that!" He hissed in her ear before releasing her roughly.

Mistybreeze panted, watching him disappear into the darkness of the forest. When she was sure he was gone, she stumbled to her paws, trembling uncontrollably. *That piece of fox dung! My mother... Diamondrain...* Fear, grief, and anger swelled through her body until she thought she would explode.

"I'm so sorry..."

She glared around, half expecting to see Revengeheart. But it was Swiftstalker. The black and white warrior padded over and sat by her side.

Mistybreeze shut her eyes. "How have you dealt with this your

whole life?" She rasped. "Being trapped in this mess?"

Swiftstalker looked at his paws and didn't respond. She sat closer to him, leaning against his shoulder. They both needed a friend now more than ever. *We'll never live the lives of true warriors.* She thought miserably. *We're traitors against our will. But at least we have each other.*

Chapter 12

"Get up."

Mistybreeze woke abruptly to a paw prodding her shoulder. She had been dreaming she was back in the nursery, playing with Coldkit and Bloodkit while Diamondrain watched them lovingly. She had purred and cuddled into her mother's soft warm fur. The dream felt bright and happy. But now, she had been forced back into a gloomy reality. She slowly opened her eyes and found herself looking up toward Revengeheart, though she couldn't bring herself to meet his gaze. *You knew they were going to kill Diamondrain too.*

"We're going to meet with the others." Revengeheart glared down at her. Beyond his white body, the first light of dawn was appearing over the pines.

Taking in her surroundings, Mistybreeze remembered she had been sitting vigil by Diamondrain's body in the camp clearing. But obviously she had fallen asleep. Guilt flooded over her. *I'm supposed to stay awake the whole night! Can't I do anything right as a loyal warrior?*

Lifting her head, she stared solemnly at Diamondrain. Her mother's body lay stiff, her soft fur ruffling gently in the breeze. Not far from her, Coldpebble was crouched, still awake, though his blue eyes were heavy with tiredness and grief. Beyond him, she saw that Crowmask was sitting at a far distance, staring at his former mate. She was surprised. *Did he sit vigil all night?*

Not far from Diamondrain lay Brownstripe's body. His three daughters sat beside him, eyes dull with loss. With them sat Depthstar, and even Blackstorm. Mistybreeze felt sick to her stomach at the sight of the black tom pretending to grieve, when he himself had lured his brother to his death.

"Come on!" Revengeheart hissed impatiently, and Mistybreeze hauled herself to her paws. She had never felt so weak and

emotionally exhausted.

Just then, the Clan elders, Buzzardglare and Bluerain, emerged from their den. "It's time for their burial," Bluerain meowed quietly, her blue eyes soft with sympathy. "Would any of you like to come help?"

"I will." Depthstar slowly stood, looking away from his son's body. Creampaw stepped to his side with a tiny nod. Tinypaw and Honeypaw pressed their heads into Brownstripe's tabby pelt, saying goodbye for the last time. Beyond them, Blackstorm caught Revengeheart's eye, twitched his tail, and slipped away out of the camp. *He'll be joining this meeting too.*

Crowmask stepped forward. "I'll help bury Diamondrain." He hesitantly glanced at Coldpebble. "If that's okay."

As her brother slowly nodded, Mistybreeze took a step forward. "I'll-"

"Don't worry, you don't have to if you don't want to." Revengeheart's broad shoulder suddenly pressed against her, and she started. "Let's go for a walk in the forest," He suggested, his tone gentle with fake sympathy. "We'll get through this together."

Frustration burned beneath Mistybreeze's pelt. She wanted to tell him to go eat fox dung and let her stay to help bury her mother. But there was no arguing with him, especially when so many cats were around. "Fine." She muttered.

Coldpebble was watching, his eyes narrowing. "You can stay if you want, Mistybreeze."

Revengeheart flashed the dark gray tom a glare. "She doesn't want to."

"How do you know what she wants?" Coldpebble lashed his tail.

Don't argue with him! Mistybreeze silently pleaded. *I don't want to lose you too!* She tried to look calmer as she met her brother's irritated gaze. "I'm alright," She meowed quietly. "A walk in the forest would be nice." She swallowed. "I'll say goodbye now."

Taking a few pawsteps forward, she crouched and pressed her nose into Diamondrain's cold fur. The fur that had once warmed and comforted her in the nursery. "I'm so sorry..." She breathed. "I love you. I hope you're safe in StarClan." Taking in her mother's scent one last time, she backed away and raised her head.

"Come on." Revengeheart swept his tail around her. "They'll take care of her."

Mistybreeze cast one last glance over her shoulder as Coldpebble hauled Mistybreeze's body onto Crowmask's shoulders. Then she sighed and allowed Revengeheart to guide her into the forest.

As soon as they were out of sight and earshot, he swished his tail away from her and grunted. "Great, now we're late! And I still have to fetch Bloodfur."

She didn't respond as they carried on through the trees. *So he's really going to drag him into this... Poor Bloodfur.*

Soon they reached a small clearing, where the others were already gathered. "Ugh, I wish I didn't have to stay awake all night with dead cats!" Blackstorm was complaining to Mottledface. "But Depthstar would have bothered me about it."

Foxshadow rolled his eyes as he picked dirt from his claws. His dark amber eyes flicked to Revengeheart and Mistybreeze as they neared. "Finally!"

"Sorry." Revengeheart glared at her. "We got delayed. Where is Poisonedsap?"

"In the camp." Swiftstalker appeared from the undergrowth, his blue eyes dark with worry. "She's talking to Cougarfoot about having more kits."

Revengeheart nodded. "Good. The more kits, the better." He glared at Mistybreeze briefly, then went on. "I'm going to find Bloodfur. Make sure to act surprised when he shows up." When the other cats agreed, he headed swiftly into the bushes and disappeared.

Mistybreeze sighed quietly and sat down in the shade of a pine tree,

further from the others. She felt drained. She became aware of a cat sitting beside her and glanced over, relieved to see it was Swiftstalker.

"Did you at least get to say goodbye?" The black and white tom asked quietly so the others wouldn't hear.

She nodded, and it was silent for a moment. "Thank you for being there last night." She murmured. After Revengeheart had threatened her, Swiftstalker had joined her for a while and walked her back to camp, where she spent the night with Diamondrain's body. "I can't believe she's gone."

"I understand." Swiftstalker looked downward, his blue eyes dull. "I went through the same when Maplefur died."

Mistybreeze remembered how the day Swiftstalker had been apprenticed, his father, Maplefur, had been found dead, killed by ThunderClan warriors. Though recently, she had learned the horrifying truth, that Maplefur had been killed by Deserve's soldiers, or Clan allies. She was fairly certain now that Poisonedsap herself had killed her own mate.

"I'm so sorry." She felt heartbroken at the loss of her mother. She could only imagine how he had felt losing his father as a kit.

Swiftstalker hesitated. "At least you still have Crowmask."

She shook her head. "He was never involved in our lives." She said quietly. "I never really had a father."

Her friend nodded. "I get it. I never really had a mother." He muttered.

They sat in silence while the others spoke to one another. Just then, Revengeheart stepped out from the undergrowth. Mistybreeze didn't look up, but knew by his scent that Bloodfur was with him.

"About time!" Blackstorm exclaimed. He then narrowed his eyes at Bloodfur, remembering he was ordered to act surprised. "What's *he* doing here?"

"Bloodfur has decided to join us," Revengeheart declared. Swiftstalker's fur bristled, as if truly surprised Revengeheart had been successful in recruiting him.

Mistybreeze found the courage to glance up at Bloodfur. The cat she had once called her friend stood beside Revengeheart, his red tabby pelt slightly ruffled. His yellow eyes were dull and clouded with a look of pain, frustration, and anger. He looked completely different from the kit she had played mossball with. She dropped her gaze, unable to look any longer. *He must have been hurting after yesterday... What did Revengeheart say to get him on his side?*

"You've made the right choice," Mottledface purred, and Blackstorm nodded.

"Do any of you believe I'm a murderer?" Bloodfur demanded, his tone harder than Mistybreeze expected to ever hear from him. It reminded her of Revengeheart's voice. Only laced with the anger was a rasp of pain.

"Of course not." Swiftstalker spoke up near her. "You'd never harm anyone." The others agreed.

Mistybreeze was genuinely puzzled. *You want him to help with murders! Could Bloodfur really be so blinded by anger, he'd become exactly the thing he wants to avoid?*

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That day, Revengeheart had led the group onto WindClan territory, to steal prey and try to provoke a battle between the Clans. Mistybreeze had guiltily participated, and even Bloodfur had fought the WindClan warriors who challenged them.

It was night now. Clouds drifted across the quarter moon in the sky. Mistybreeze sat alone in the forest, looking down at a mound of freshly disturbed earth. Coldpebble had told her where they had buried Diamondrain. She wanted to visit her mother's resting place. She closed her eyes, relaxing in the silence of the night.

Are you watching over me, Diamondrain? She wondered, lifting her

gaze to the few stars twinkling between patches of clouds. *Do you blame me for your death? It is my fault... If I hadn't become mates with-*

"Mistybreeze."

As if her thoughts had summoned him, Revengeheart's voice sounded behind her. Her fur bristled in surprise, and she turned to face him. "Yes?"

"What are you doing out here?" He demanded. "I was waiting for you in the warriors den."

She knew he didn't come out to find her because he missed her company. He wanted her near him at all times. "I wanted to visit my mother." She muttered. *I don't need your permission to go anywhere.*

"Ah." He cast a brief glance at the mound of dirt, then returned his attention to Mistybreeze. "Look, it's been long enough." He lashed his tail. "I want kits. We *need* kits." A growl rumbled in his throat.

Unease churned in her stomach. But she stood and glared at him, angry that he would pester her about this at her mother's grave. "I don't want kits right now." She growled, trying to keep her voice from trembling.

Revengeheart's amber eyes flashed angrily in the darkness. "I'm sick of playing this game!" He hissed furiously and began circling her. "I've been patient with you for *moons*!" He stopped, standing over Diamondrain's grave, and dug his claws deep into the dirt.

The sight of such disrespect made Mistybreeze's head pulse with anger. "Stop that!"

"No, *you* stop!" He snarled, his white fur bristling along his spine. "I'm not taking no as an answer. If you're going to be completely useless to me, you might as well hang out in *StarClan* with your mother!"

Revengeheart crouched, his eyes narrowed to slits, and her blood seemed to freeze. *He's going to kill me!* She unsheathed her claws, ready to fight, though she doubted she stood a chance against the

bloodthirsty warrior.

She flinched back in shock as a dark shape shot out from the darkness between her and the white tom. "Enough, Revengeheart!" Swiftstalker hissed, glaring at him. "Why would she ever want to have kits with you when you treat her like dung?"

Revengeheart's eyes blazed with fury. "Mind your own business!" He spat at his brother. With a snarl he leaped, and Mistybreeze gasped as the two brothers locked into battle, hissing and clawing at each other.

The fight only lasted a moment before Revengeheart pushed Swiftstalker to the ground, baring his teeth. "You'd better figure out where your loyalties lie, brother. Stop getting in my way!" He dug his claws into his shoulders before releasing him. He glared over his shoulder at Mistybreeze when he stalked away. "You agreed to become my mate! Start remembering what that means." With that, he disappeared into the darkness.

Mistybreeze stared after him, slowly calming herself. He was gone. *For now... He's never going to leave me alone about this.* She turned as Swiftstalker pulled himself to his feet. "Thanks for that," She meowed quietly, padding toward him. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine." Swiftstalker said, though he winced as he stood and gave his shoulder a few licks. He raised his gaze. "Are you?"

Mistybreeze found herself staring at Diamondrain's grave. A wave of pain and sorrow washed over her as she thought of not just her mother, but the situation she was in. *All I ever wanted was to be a loyal ShadowClan warrior. To spend time with my friends, and a cat who loved me. Instead, I'm involved with murderers and being pressured to have kits.* "No." She whispered. "I'm not okay."

The black and white warrior quietly sat beside her. "I never wanted to be a part of all this either." He meowed. "But I was born into it. In Poisonedsap's eyes, me and Revengeheart are just weapons." He paused. "I want to protect ShadowClan from her. But I don't know how."

Mistybreeze hesitated before speaking quietly. "She killed Maplefur, didn't she?"

The tom seemed to flinch a little, glancing about nervously to make sure no cat was nearby. "Yes." He whispered after a moment. "I saw her do it."

She was startled. She suspected Swiftstalker might have been told the truth about his father's death, but never thought he could have witnessed it himself. "I'm so sorry... You were just a kit." She blinked. "Why haven't you told Depthstar?"

Swiftstalker looked at his paws. "When I was a kit, Poisonedsap threatened to kill every cat in the nursery if I told anyone. And Poisonedsap is clever. If Depthstar confronted her about it, she would change the story, and she has enough cats in the Clan who would back her up." He paused. "Do you remember in the battle with ThunderClan, Poisonedsap told everyone she killed Hickoryroot to protect me?"

When she nodded, he scoffed. "That was a lie. Revengeheart killed him for the sake of killing him. One less ThunderClan warrior."

Mistybreeze remembered how she and Coldpebble had admired Revengeheart as he bragged about the battle, boasting and showing off his shoulder scar. He'd *enjoyed* the battle and bloodshed. She shuddered. *How could I have been so wrong about him?*

"I'm sorry you're in this mess, Mistybreeze." Swiftstalker said quietly. "If I could get you out of it, I would." He sighed. "But I can't even free myself from it."

She felt a pang of sympathy and touched his flank with her tail. "I'm glad you're here. It would be much harder to cope without a friend."

Swiftstalker gave a small purr. "It's been a long long time since I've had a friend. I'm glad we can at least confide in each other." It was quiet for a while, the silence broken occasionally by crickets chirping in the night. "I'm worried about Bloodfur."

Her heart sunk at the mention of their old friend. "Do you think

Revengeheart and the others will change him?"

"I hope not." Swiftstalker lifted his gaze to the night sky. "I remember the days we'd play mossball together." He broke into a small purr. "He was my best friend."

Mistybreeze's heart warmed as she retrieved her memories. "He played with me and Coldpebble too. We had so much fun." The warmth faded. "We couldn't wait to train as apprentices together. But then one day, he said he wanted nothing to do with us."

"I wanted to keep being his friend." He said. "But Poisonedsap hated it. And the more time I spent with her followers, the more danger I knew I was putting him in." He sighed "So I had to shut him out."

"Well... Now the three of us are together again." Mistybreeze meowed solemnly. "Trapped in this mess." As she and Swiftstalker sat together, staring at the stars, she wondered what StarClan thought of them. *Do they consider us traitors and hate us? Or do they believe we stand any chance against Poisonedsap? Or are we destined for darkness?*

Chapter 13

"In a few days, Bloodfur will lead an attack on the medicine cats at Highstones." Poisonedsap was meowing smoothly.

The ShadowClan allies were meeting in their usual clearing, sitting in a disorganized group around their leader. The golden brown and black queen sat on a mossy log, a smile spread across her muzzle as she surveyed the cats below. Revengeheart, Mottledface, and Blackstorm were closest to her, tails twitching eagerly. Foxshadow was close behind them, his fluffy tail rested around Amberrose. Spiderfang and Falconclaw sat together, attention locked on their mother. The sun had set behind her, and the last light of day was vanishing into the horizon.

"How many do you think he and the soldiers can kill?" Mottledface demanded.

Poisonedsap's amber eyes glittered. "As many as they can. Ryeheart is old, and Spicewhisker is a puny little thing." She paused. "Clovernose of WindClan tells me their old medicine cat Silverberry is distraught over losing Starfaith. She will be weaker and easier than ever to finish off."

Mistybreeze sat at the back of the group near Swiftstalker. She felt sick to her stomach as she listened to Poisonedsap discuss taking the lives of the medicine cats so carelessly, as if they were no more than mice. She had been even more shocked when Bloodfur had agreed to lead the deadly attack himself. *Has he really changed so much?* She wondered. *Is he really as cold hearted as the rest of these cats?*

"I feel the final battle is nearing." Poisonedsap growled, scraping the bark under her with her claws. "We must *all* be prepared." As she spoke, her amber eyes flashed to Mistybreeze, who stiffened. "I want you all battle training tomorrow at dawn." She flicked her tail

dismissively, and the cats began to leave, creeping off into the undergrowth.

Revengeheart lashed his tail at Mistybreeze, and sighed through her nostrils as she rose to follow him.

"Mistybreeze."

Poisonedsap's voice by her ear startled her, and she turned to see the golden she-cat standing beside her, eyes narrow. "I'd like a word with you." She spoke in a kind and smooth tone that she didn't trust.

Glancing toward Revengeheart, she saw annoyance in his gaze, but he wouldn't argue with his mother. He gave Poisonedsap a nod before heading through the trees toward the camp.

Mistybreeze wasn't sure where she'd rather be, here with Poisonedsap, or back at camp with Revengeheart. She grew nervous as she turned and saw that she was alone with two cats. Poisonedsap stood in the shadows, while a short distance behind her sat Amberrose. Both she-cats watched her through identical glittering amber eyes.

"What is it?" She asked steadily, hoping she sounded braver than she felt. *I'm sure this is about me having kits again!*

Poisonedsap stepped toward her, eyes narrowed to slivers of fire in the darkness. "This has gone on long enough, Mistybreeze," She growled. "The time for games is running out. When will you and Revengeheart have kits? It's your duty."

"Yes!" Amberrose purred and began circling her. "Our success depends on it."

Mistybreeze crouched a little nervously, glaring at the golden she-cat. "If it's so important, why aren't *you* having kits?"

"*I'm* worth more to the plan." Amberrose scoffed proudly, raising her chin as she flicked Mistybreeze on the shoulder with her tail. "Unlike you."

"That's right." Poisonedsap purred, eyes gleaming proudly at her daughter. "Amberrose is a cunning and skilled opponent in battle." She stretched her jaws in a yawn. "Revengeheart tells me you have the skills of a flightless pigeon."

Flightless pigeon! Mistybreeze bristled in offense that her so-called "mate" had said that. *I could fight fine in battle! But I don't enjoy battle like these fox hearts!* She was outnumbered, but wasn't going to stand here and be called useless. She opened her jaws to argue, hardly caring what the consequences were.

"Mistybreeze is a fine opponent in battle."

Swiftstalker emerged from the undergrowth, his white markings almost glowing against his black pelt in the shadows. She was relieved to have his support. *I'm not outnumbered anymore.*

Poisonedsap whipped her head around, glaring at her son. "This is she-cat talk, Swiftstalker," She hissed. "Go back to camp."

He ignored her and padded to Mistybreeze's side. "I've seen her fight, and she's just as skilled as any other warrior," He went on. "And she is older and more experienced than you, Amberrose." His half sister bristled angrily at this.

"Thank you, Swiftstalker," Mistybreeze growled, glad to see how agitated both she-cats looked.

With a lash of her tail, Amberrose laughed. "Well, you two seem to like each other! Why don't you have kits with him, Mistybreeze, if you hate your own mate so much? It doesn't matter whose kits they are, as long as there's kits!"

While Swiftstalker hissed at his half sister, Mistybreeze's fur rose along her spine angrily. "I don't want kits!" She shot back, feeling a little braver with Swiftstalker by her side. "I would much rather fight in battle than be stuck in the nursery!"

Amberrose was chuckling, but Poisonedsap raised her ragged tail to quiet her, a smile on her face as she gazed steadily at Mistybreeze. "Very well. If you really want to fight, Mistybreeze, we'd better

sharpen those lousy skills."

Mistybreeze narrowed her eyes, her heart pounding. *Is she going to make me fight her? Or Amberrose?* She believed she was a decent fighter, but wasn't sure she stood a chance against either of these she-cats. *They've trained to fight like rogues.*

"Fight Swiftstalker." Poisonedsap ordered. "Show me what you can do."

Swiftstalker? As she tensed, Amberrose added. "Yeah, and don't play fight like kittypets! We want blood!" She sounded so eager, it made Mistybreeze sick. *She's just like her mother!*

She met Swiftstalkers gaze, seeing her own reservations reflected in his blue eyes. *I don't want to hurt my friend! Why couldn't it be Poisonedsap or Amberrose? I'd have a much easier time drawing blood from them!* But she knew she had no choice now. Perhaps everyone would leave her alone about kits once she proved she could fight.

"Fight!" Poisonedsap snarled into the night.

I have to do it. Mistybreeze swallowed and crouched, looking at the black and white tom. *I'll try not to hurt him.* As Swiftstalker watched her, preparing himself, she sprang at him.

She was faintly surprised at how easily she knocked him into the grass, and realized immediately he wasn't going to fight as hard as he could. He didn't want to hurt her either. For a heartbeat she didn't know what to do. We need to fake this. With a small hiss she batted a sheathed paw at his shoulder.

Swiftstalker let out a snarl of pain that she knew was fake. He kicked her away and then lunged at her swiftly, closing his teeth around her forearm, though he only scraped the skin.

As Mistybreeze pulled away and wrestled with him, she risked a glance beyond them. Poisonedsap and Amberrose sat watching them with a mildly amused, mildly annoyed look on their faces. *We must look like a couple of play fighting kits.*

"You need to hurt me." Swiftstalker hissed in her ear as he pinned

her onto her side. "They won't take you seriously unless they see blood."

Mistybreeze hated the thought of hurting her friend, but knew he was right. With a flash of regret, she unsheathed her claws and raked them across his shoulder, flinching as she ripped black fur from his pelt. Swiftstalker hissed and pulled away, making sure his bleeding shoulder was visible to Poisonedsap. He crouched, and Mistybreeze attacked him again.

She felt terrible as she scratched at him, careful to only leave small cuts. Swiftstalker swung at her, purposely missing, and pretended to struggle. He was letting her win.

"I've seen enough." The scorn in Poisonedsap's voice made her tense. *Does she know it was all an act? Was this all for nothing?*

As she backed off of Swiftstalker, she froze. *Oh no.* Her friend rose to his paws, wincing from slash marks across his shoulder. Blood trickled from small cuts on his chest and muzzle. *I didn't want to hurt him!*

Poisonedsap stalked up to him, her expression full of agitation. "You're absolutely pathetic!" She spat. "Only you could be beaten by a weak little she-cat like her."

"Good thing you've had more kits." Amberrose pointed out, rolling her eyes. "Or Revengeheart would be your only accomplishment!"

"I told you she was strong." Swiftstalker narrowed his eyes.

Mistybreeze froze as Poisonedsap swung and lashed her claws across his cheek. Swiftstalker hissed in pain and glared at her as she snarled. "You'd better toughen up in time for the battle." Her blazing amber gaze moved to Mistybreeze. "*You* might have some potential," She grunted. "I'll tell Revengeheart to involve you in more training sessions."

"O-okay." She relaxed a little. Was the pressure to have kits finally going to stop?

With a last glare at Swiftstalker, Poisonedsap whipped around.

"Let's go, Amberrose."

Mistybreeze was relieved as the two golden she-cats left the clearing and disappeared into the shadows, leaving her alone with Swiftstalker. Both cats were silent for several moments, making sure Poisonedsap and her daughter had really left.

At last, Swiftstalker huffed out a sigh and started to lick his shoulder wound. "Thank StarClan that's over."

She padded over to him and sniffed his pelt worriedly. "Are you okay? I'm so sorry for hurting you."

"We didn't have much of a choice." Swiftstalker responded with a shrug. "Besides, I'm used to the sting of claws."

"Thank you." She sighed, suddenly very tired. "You seem to always appear at the right time."

He paused from licking his cuts. "I sort of spy on you sometimes," He admitted, looking embarrassed. "I want to make sure nothing happens to you." He hesitated. "Poisonedsap and Revengeheart only wanted you a part of this to have kits. And if you don't want that, well..."

Mistybreeze's blood ran cold with dread as a thought struck her. "Do you think they would kill me?" She whispered.

"I... I'm not sure." Swiftstalker admitted quietly. "But I don't want to wait and find out."

It was quiet for a long moment. It was dark now, stars twinkling in the sky above them. "Bloodfur seems to be settling in... well." He suddenly commented.

Mistybreeze's heart sank. "He doesn't seem to care about the warrior code, or his family anymore." She stated sadly. "Do you think he's really going to go through with killing the medicine cats?"

Her friend was quiet for a moment. "I don't know. He seems to be a different cat now." He stared up at the stars of silverpelt. "Only StarClan knows where his path leads now."

***

At dawn, Mistybreeze had been asked to join the group in battle training practice. To her dismay, Revengeheart insisted on pairing up with her. And he did not go easy on her or fake anything like Swiftstalker.

She'd been relieved when later that day, the group had split up to do some hunting. Though a couple scratches on her forearm still stung, she ignored it and stalked through the grass toward a mouse she had spotted. *I wish I could bring this prey back for my Clan.* She thought sadly. *Instead, Revengeheart will probably claim it.* Narrowing her eyes, she shot forward and pounced, swiftly biting the neck of the mouse.

"Good catch."

The sound of Bloodfur's voice startled her. She released the mouse and spun to see the red tabby tom padding toward her. "I was hesitating too long." He said.

"Oh." She twitched her tail awkwardly. "Sorry. I didn't realize you were stalking it too."

"It's okay."

Mistybreeze hesitantly turned away from him, deciding to bury the mouse for later. She realized this was the first time she had exchanged words with Bloodfur since the day they'd been apprenticed, and he had snapped at she and Coldpebble. She felt a flash of irritation. *Does he think he can pretend he never hurt us? That we can get along now just because we're both involved with Poisonedsap's plot?*

She felt uncomfortable being alone with him. She glanced at him warily before turning away, deciding to head back to where the others were hunting. Somehow it felt like a better idea. She started forward.

"I didn't kill your mother."

She stopped in her tracks and looked at him sharply, his words

startling her. He was watching her, a nervous look on his face. Did he really think she blamed him for Diamondrain's death? She held his gaze for a moment, debating on how to respond. "I know you didn't. You wouldn't hurt anyone." She hesitated, thinking of that day he had cut off their friendship. "At least, not with your claws."

As the painful memory returned, she turned and headed through the trees, wanting to get away from him. The fur along her spine prickled uneasily as she realized Bloodfur had followed her and was padding alongside her silently. *What does he want?* She was about to ask him to leave her alone when he said something even more surprising.

"I'm sorry for what I said you you and Coldpebble all those moons ago." Bloodfur said quietly. She glanced at him, taken back and unsure what to say. "I've been wanting to apologize since the moment I said it, but the time was never right, and I didn't think you or your brother wanted to hear anything I had to say. I had a lot going on, and I didn't mean to take it out on you. I'm sorry."

Mistybreeze could hardly believe his words. She had never expected an outright apology from him. Especially now, when he had shown such a cold side of him. And yet she knew he was being honest. She caught his eye and saw regret and hope in his golden gaze. What could she do but forgive him? Life was too short to hold grudges.

"I forgive you, Bloodfur." She meowed at last. But she still felt awkward, not knowing what else to say. "We should go back to the group," She suggested hastily, and without waiting for his response, she took off through the trees.

Her mind whirled as she wondered what to make of Bloodfur. *He's a part of Poisonedsap's plot now.* She thought. *He's willing to help kill the medicine cats tonight... And yet he's also willing to apologize for his mistakes and try to mend our friendship?*

***

Later that day, Greenpine's kits had been apprenticed. Depthstar had assigned Revengeheart and Swiftstalker as mentors. Swiftstalker had been happy to receive an apprentice, while

Revengeheart seemed to think it was the worst thing that could have happened to him.

"Ebonypaw, look!" Flintpaw gasped as ventured into the forest, staring at his surroundings. "The forest is *huge*!" His sister followed more slowly, as though something was troubling her. Though as she looked up, her dark green gaze flooded with awe.

"Slow down, Flintpaw!" Swiftstalker called, his voice warm with amusement.

Revengeheart and Mistybreeze followed him. She had been asked by Revengeheart to come along, obviously because he hated leaving her alone. He seemed to think she was going to run away or tell his secrets to the Clan if she wasn't in his sight.

"Right." Revengeheart grumbled, a look of utter misery on his face. "Let's go to the training clearing and start battle training."

Swiftstalker narrowed his eyes at his brother. "We should start with a tour of the territory. Battle training-"

"Battle training is all that matters!" The white tom shot back. "Let's go."

Swiftstalker lashed his tail. "Flintpaw is my apprentice," He meowed firmly. "I'll train him how I see fit." He turned away. "Come on, Flintpaw. I'll show you the ThunderClan border."

"Okay!" Flintpaw brightened and bounded after his mentor. Mistybreeze admired Swiftstalker for standing up to Revengeheart.

As the two cats vanished, Revengeheart snorted. "Stupid furball." He looked at Ebonypaw, who was staring after her brother rather enviously. "*We* will be doing battle training."

***

"No, no! You're doing it all wrong!"

Mistybreeze sat at the side of the clearing, watching uneasily as Revengeheart glared down at his apprentice. "I told you to leap,

then slash!"

She crouched and stared up at him guiltily. "I'm sorry, I-"

"Aren't you listening to me?" Revengeheart hissed. "I'm your *mentor*. You're supposed to do what I say."

As Ebonypaw flattened herself to the ground, Mistybreeze rose to her paws, unable to sit and watch any longer. "She's doing her best, Revengeheart." She meowed steadily. "You're trying to to show her complex battle moves when she's fresh out of the nursery."

A look of anger blazed in Revengeheart's eyes, and she stiffened, wondering if she'd been wrong to speak so freely. "Are *you* Ebonypaw's mentor?" He growled.

"No, but-"

"Exactly. So keep your nose out of my training!" He shouldered her aside.

With a lash of her tail, Mistybreeze returned to the side of the clearing, watching sympathetically as Revengeheart instructed Ebonypaw. She tried her best to copy his moves and do as he said, but she was just too small.

By the time the sun had begun to set, Revengeheart sighed. "Well, that's enough for one day." He glared at his apprentice. "I expect better from you tomorrow."

"Yes, Revengeheart." Ebonypaw mumbled, sounding miserable.

As the broad shouldered tom left the clearing, Ebonypaw slowly followed, her tail drooping.

Mistybreeze felt terrible for her. *Today was her first day as an apprentice, and it was horrible.* She stepped forward and touched her nose to the tabby she-cat's ear. "You did just fine today," She murmured, hoping Revengeheart couldn't hear her. "Revengeheart is expecting far too much of you."

The apprentice shrugged. "Maybe I'm just not good enough." She

muttered. As she continued after Revengeheart, Mistybreeze watched her solemnly. *Depthstar made a huge mistake giving Revengeheart an apprentice... Poor Ebonypaw has a hard path ahead of her.*

Chapter 14

"There's no escape, Mistybreeze!"

Mistybreeze crouched in the darkness, terrified as Revengeheart loomed over her, seeming bigger and more powerful than ever. His eyes burned like fire as he glared down at her triumphantly.

She started backwards only to bump into another cat and spun to see Poisonedsap, who swept her ragged tail around her as she purred. "We need as many kits as possible!"

"We will destroy the Clans!" Deserve's green eyes flashed at the corner of her vision. As she looked toward the Army leader, she gasped. Around him lay the bloody bodies of Diamondrain, Coldpebble, Dewstorm, Swiftstalker...

"No!" Mistybreeze yowled and started toward the motionless cats, but a dark red tabby stepped in her path. *Bloodfur?* As she caught his gaze he stared back at her, a look of conflict on his face.

"Death to the Clans! Death to the Clans!" The cats around her chanted eagerly, and as the world dimmed around her, the last thing she saw was the glow of Bloodfur's yellow eyes before everything went black.

Suddenly Mistybreeze found herself awake. She kept her eyes closed as she sighed quietly through her nose. *Just another bad dream...* But the relief vanished as quickly as it came. *No. Most of it is still real.* She sensed movement and twitched an ear, not raising her chin from her nest as she flicked her gaze toward the den entrance. A red tabby tail was just rippling out of sight.

Bloodfur. She glanced at the nest beside her. Revengeheart was still asleep, his scarred white flank rising and falling slowly. Very quietly, she rose from her nest and crept around her sleeping

Clanmates cautiously. She took a step out into the clearing and paused.

On the other side of the camp, Bloodfur had his back to her. To her puzzlement, he crouched outside the dirtplace, as still and focused as though he were hunting prey. *What's he doing?* Her fur prickled uneasily. *Is Flameheart in there? Or Bloomfire?* Whoever it was, she could see what Bloodfur planned to do when they emerged.

But would he really kill a cat? Mistybreeze wondered sadly, remembering her playful kithood friend. She decided not to wait to find out. Perhaps she could talk to him about this. As she stepped lightly and carefully toward Bloodfur, it occurred to her that if he saw her as a threat, he just might kill her. The thought didn't bother her much. *I suppose it would get me out of this situation, wouldn't it?*

She was a tail length away from him now. He still seemed unaware of her nearing, his attention focused on the dirtplace where his target was. She hesitated before she spoke quietly. "Bloodfur?"

Startled, he spun to face her, fur bristling and claws sliding out. Yet Mistybreeze felt strangely calm as she warily met his yellow eyes. "What are you doing?"

Bloodfur looked alarmed. "I-I..." He was searching for an explanation. "I was... waiting to go to the dirtplace."

"Oh." *You seemed awfully eager about it.* She thought. *And you're a terrible liar!* She hesitated as she considered talking to him alone. *I really don't think he's a bad cat.* I think he needs someone to talk to about his feelings, and someone who isn't going to encourage his anger. She thought about it a moment longer before she made her decision. "Well, when you're done, would you like to go for a walk in the forest?"

He looked surprised. "Uh, sure." He cast a glance over his shoulder at the dirtplace. "Let's go."

Mistybreeze guessed he wanted to get out of camp before whoever was using the dirtplace finished their business. "I thought you had to go..." She inquired, curious what he would say.

"Uh-no, not anymore," Bloodfur stammered awkwardly. "You scared it right out of me." He kicked the ground with his hind claws as though covering his dirt.

She rolled her eyes, mildly amused. "Toms." She headed for the thorn tunnel, aware of Bloodfur following her closely. As the two of them slipped through, she saw that Crowmask and Copperstripe were on guard.

Crowmask narrowed his eyes. "Where are you going?"

"Just for a walk." Mistybreeze replied as she and Bloodfur paused.

"With *him?*" The black warrior glared at Bloodfur. "Are you sure that's a good idea?"

Mistybreeze knew her father was among the most suspicious of Bloodfur. He believed that he was a murderer. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Bloodfur bristle in offense.

Copperstripe looked wary. "I'll go with you if you'd like, Mistybreeze." He offered. "We don't need any more deaths-"

"Don't talk like I'm not here!" Bloodfur spat angrily at the guards. "I never killed anyone!"

A growl rumbled in Crowmask's throat as he leaned toward the young warrior. "As far as I'm concerned, you're a murderer who deserves no place in ShadowClan!" He bared his teeth. "You killed Diamondrain."

Mistybreeze flinched at the mention of her mother. As Bloodfur started to growl, she pushed between the two toms. "There's no proof that Bloodfur did anything," She pointed out calmly to Crowmask. "We've known each other since we were kits. I'm perfectly comfortable being alone in the forest with him."

The black warrior didn't take his eyes off the red tabby, his amber eyes slitted. His tail lashed slowly. After a moment, he looked away. "Fine." He muttered to Mistybreeze. "But be careful."

Dipping her head, Mistybreeze proceeded into the forest, aware of

Crowmask and Copperstripe watching. Bloodfur shot them a glare before following her.

It was silent for a long time as she and Bloodfur strolled through the forest. A bright moon shone overhead, giving the pines a calming blue tint. She glanced at her companion a few times, wondering if he would speak first, but he stayed quiet. *I'm guessing he's not too happy about what Crowmask and Copperstripe said.*

Mistybreeze knew they were wrong about his crimes. Bloodfur had not killed any cat. Poisonedsap and Deserve were responsible for the deaths, and had made the Clan believe he had been behind the killings. *But just because he hasn't killed yet doesn't mean he won't. I'm sure it was Flameheart or Bloomfire in the dirtplace, and he intended to kill them. How long before he proves our Clanmates right about him?*

After a long while, she broke the silence with a daring question. "Do you really want to kill your parents?" She couldn't look at him as she asked.

"My parents are dead." Bloodfur responded.

"I mean Flameheart and Bloomfire." She corrected herself.

"They aren't my parents."

She twitched an ear. "Aren't they? They raised you." She pointed out, hoping to remind him how much his foster parents cared for him.

To her dismay, Bloodfur didn't respond and looked away from her, seeming irritated. *Well, this isn't a good start.* Mistybreeze glanced down as she walked, lightly batting away a pinecone in her path as she thought of what to say.

She could understand he was upset about being lied to his whole life, but couldn't help but feel he was being rather foolish. She knew very well that kin meant much more than blood. *Crowmask and I share blood, yet he's just another warrior to me. He was never there for me growing up. Flameheart isn't related to Bloodfur at all, and he's always been a great father to him.*

She hesitated before she went on, hoping to point this out to him. "My father never paid much attention to me and Coldpebble." She said quietly. "Diamondrain only spoke to us a few times after we were made apprentices. You're so lucky to have had Flameheart and Bloomfire as parents. They stuck with you the whole way. My-"

"Can we talk about something else?" Bloodfur cut her off with a growl. "Like, maybe how to get rid of the other medicine cats?"

Mistybreeze's heart sunk with disappointment. Not only had she failed to get through to him about his foster parents, but now he was talking about killing the medicine cats! *Am I wrong about him?* She wondered. *Could he be a killer waiting to strike? "*Dewstorm is my uncle." She meowed quietly, half to herself.

For a long moment, neither cat spoke. She looked away from him uncomfortably, suddenly regretting her decision to talk to him. *This was a mistake. He might even tell Revengeheart what I said. He-*

"I'll race you to the top of that tree."

Did I hear that right? Mistybreeze snapped her attention to him, surprised and confused. "What? Why?"

"For fun." Bloodfur flicked her on the shoulder with his tail before sprinting at a large pine tree.

Fun? For a heartbeat, she just stared after him, wondering if this was the same cat who wanted to talk about killing medicine cats just moments ago. *Is he crazy?* But he had already reached the trunk of the tree, clearly thinking she was following. *Okay then.*

She blinked before she bunched her sleepy muscles and charged after Bloodfur. She scrambled up the tree after him, leaping nimbly to surpass him onto a higher branch. *I haven't climbed a tree in ages!* She looked down at Bloodfur as she dug her claws into the bark of the next branch. "Too slow." She purred.

"Oh, yeah?" Bloodfur's eyes gleamed playfully and leaped to the next branch, and Mistybreeze spun and ascended to the next one before he could reach her.

As Mistybreeze soared up the tree, the cool night air whisking past her with each leap, she realized she hadn't felt so carefree in moons. She quickened her speed, darting from branch to branch and breathing in the strong piney scent.

When she reached the last branch near top of the tree that could support a cat's weight, she steadied herself onto it and sat down, Taking a moment to catch her breath. Looking down, she was surprised to see Bloodfur still several branches below her, making his way up.

When he finally joined her on the top branch, she couldn't hide her amusement. She'd enjoyed their little race more than she thought she would. "You took your time." She teased.

"Yeah, well, I was being careful." Bloodfur chuckled. "You must be part squirrel."

"Then you must be part turtle." She purred, and he gasped, asking her to take back the comment, but she refused. "You climb like a badger that just woke up!"

Bloodfur laughed and sat beside her. "I'd be a pretty talented badger then! You might as well be a bird." He paused. "Remember when we were kits, you'd jump so high to catch mossballs I was afraid you'd go through the roof of the nursery?"

She broke into laughter. "Of course! We had lots of fun."

"Even then you were a high jumper." Bloodfur purred. "We should have seen this coming!"

Mistybreeze purred in amusement. "Remember the time Swiftstalker ran headfirst into a tree?"

"No!" He broke into laughter and had to dig his claws into the branch to keep balanced. "When was that?"

"When he was an apprentice," Mistybreeze chuckled, realizing this was after he and Bloodfur had stopped being friends. "He was chasing after a frog with that crazy speed he has. He was going so fast, he couldn't dodge the tree on time."

Bloodfur purred loudly. "I wish I'd seen that!"

As Mistybreeze laughed with him, she realized how happy she was in this moment. All her worries about Revengeheart and Poisonedsap were far below her in the forest. Up here with Bloodfur, between the treetops and the stars of silverpelt, everything felt right. As she watched Bloodfur laugh, his yellow eyes warm and happy, she knew she'd been right all along. He was not a bad cat, and he certainly wouldn't hurt any cat. That is, unless some cats took advantage of him and pushed him toward anger and hatred.

Revengeheart. Feelings of anger and disgust dimmed her happiness for a moment as she thought of her mate. Looking at Bloodfur, she wanted to tell him about how Revengeheart and Poisonedsap pit the Clan against him. That he should forgive his foster parents and move on. But seeing how happy he seemed now, she didn't dare ruin the moment.

Her feelings of amusement faded, and she spoke seriously to him. "I'm sorry I brought up Flameheart and Bloomfire. I was just trying to help."

"I know. It's okay." Bloodfur hesitated, looking downward. "Nothing will help though. I'd rather talk like they don't exist." He muttered. "They lied to me."

"But they did it for you." Mistybreeze commented quietly. He didn't respond, staring down into the branches below. She watched him sympathetically, seeing a mixture of sadness and anger in the yellow eyes she had admired as a kit. She'd rather see him happy like he had been moments ago.

She hesitated for a moment before following her instinct. She leaned closer to him and rubbed her cheek against his striped shoulder. He started a little in surprise, his fur rising briefly before he relaxed and it flattened again. He purred. *I wonder how long it's been since any cat has shown him affection? Since he shut out Bloomfire and Flameheart?*

"We should do this again sometime." Bloodfur meowed hesitantly,

his mew edged with hopefulness.

He could use a true friend. Mistybreeze thought as she rested her tail around him. *Just like Swiftstalker and I needed each other.* "That would be nice." She purred quietly.

As she felt Bloodfur purr in response, she realized that she felt different with Bloodfur than she did with Swiftstalker. It was the way Revengeheart had made her feel before he'd shown her his true personality.

The two of them stayed at the top of the pine for a while longer, enjoying the view of the night sky hanging over the forest, and the calming scents of the night. Then they made their way down the tree, this time without a race. Mistybreeze sensed that they were both in good spirits as they made their way back to camp. Even as they passed Crowmask and Copperstripe, Bloodfur remained calm. Both looked relieved to see Mistybreeze had returned without a scratch on her.

"I hope Cobratail doesn't put either of us on the dawn patrol." Mistybreeze commented, curling her tail in amusement. "I'm tired from that climbing!"

"Me too," Bloodfur purred back.

She started toward the warriors' den but paused, realizing he wasn't following. "Aren't you going to sleep too?"

"I just have to use the dirtplace first." Bloodfur meowed. As she tilted her head, he added with a gleam in his eyes. "For real this time!"

Mistybreeze shook her head in amusement and padded into the warriors' den, carefully stepping around Ashcloud and Timberstorm. When she reached her nest, she curled up in a silver ball, feeling content. She closed her eyes, ready for sleep.

"Where were you?"

Her eyes snapped open. She uncurled herself and turned to see Revengeheart laying in his nest beside her, his chin on his black

paws. He had been so still, she'd assumed he was asleep when she first entered then den. But he was awake, his amber eyes accusing and fixed on her.

"Using the dirtplace." Mistybreeze meowed the first thing that came to mind.

"Don't lie to me!" Revengeheart hissed in a whisper. "I saw you come back into camp with Bloodfur." His eyes narrowed to slits. "I know exactly what you two were doing."

Mistybreeze swallowed. What would Revengeheart say if he knew they'd raced and laughed together? That she'd tried to ease his anger toward his parents? "We were just talking-"

"Exactly!" He growled. "And I know what you were talking about." Before she could respond, he went on. "You were trying to talk him out of trying to kill Dewstorm, weren't you? Just because he's your uncle doesn't mean he's excusable." He rolled his eyes. "Stupid she-cat."

She let his words go in one ear and out the other. She relaxed, relieved that he didn't suspect she was befriending Bloodfur. "Sorry," She mumbled. He grunted in response before settling back into his nest, turning his back to her.

While Mistybreeze curled up again, Bloodfur padded through the entrance of the den. He looked at her for a moment, his whiskers twitching warmly. Then he crept past her to his nest.

As she closed her eyes and welcomed sleep, she felt strangely relaxed. Her time with Bloodfur tonight had been the most fun she'd had in moons. Unlike with Revengeheart, she enjoyed his company and wasn't afraid of him. *I hope we can spend more time together.*

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"And I'll team up with Blackstorm," Revengeheart sneered. "Since Mistybreeze is such a bad fighter."

Mistybreeze looked down as Poisonedsap's ShadowClan allies all laughed at her. Frustration pulsed through her paws as she longed

to swipe the grins off all their faces, especially Mottledface, Amberrose, and Foxshadow. *I'd show you how bad a fighter I am!*

It seemed like the more Mistybreeze refused to have kits, the more Revengeheart picked on her. Suddenly it was as if she was hardly an asset to the plan. She was just the cat everyone could bully or practice attacks on. Battle practice was never fun for her.

As the laughter died down, she raised her gaze and was glad to see that one cat wasn't laughing. Bloodfur. His tail was lashing as he spoke up. "I guess that leaves me and Mistybreeze."

Revengeheart agreed, and Mistybreeze felt relieved. Bloodfur and Swiftstalker were the only cats in the group she felt comfortable with, and Swiftstalker had already been paired with Falconclaw.

As she and Bloodfur padded away from the others to find a place to practice, Mistybreeze couldn't help but dwell on Revengeheart's words. *He's much stronger than me. But I'm tough. I could put up a good fight, that's for sure! And I'd give him some scars, though I'm sure he'd never boast about being beaten by a she-cat. The smug furball.*

"Why does Revengeheart treat you so badly?" Bloodfur's quiet question broke her from her bitter thoughts.

Mistybreeze hesitated, unsure of how to respond. *How much should I tell him?* She let go of her worries. Bloodfur was her friend, and she felt comfortable enough to confide in him. "He's mad because I won't have kits," She admitted. "He's been pressuring me about it for moons. I don't know why he's so insistent about it."

He seemed startled to hear this. "Do you want kits?" He asked after a moment.

She was about to say no when she hesitated. She'd been pestered about it so often by Revengeheart and Poisonedsap, just the idea of kits made her frightened and angry. But now, she pushed the two cats out of the picture. *Do I want kits? Not Revengeheart's kits, not kits for this plot. But kits for myself? Kits who would become ShadowClan warriors?* "Maybe..." She muttered. "But not his."

"Then why are you mates?" Bloodfur asked in confusion as they walked.

Mistybreeze sighed and spoke her thoughts out loud. "I don't know. He seemed like a different cat at the time. I had no idea what I was getting into, like this whole alliance with Deserve to attack the Clans. I want no part in this!"

He stared at her, his thoughts unreadable. "Why don't you leave?"

"I don't think I can." Mistybreeze suddenly felt vulnerable as the weight of the situation came crashing down on her. "They won't let me, and... I think I know too much."

Bloodfur seemed to know exactly what she was saying. "They wouldn't kill you."

"I wouldn't put it past that group of fox hearts." Suddenly, alarm shot through her like a lightning bolt. She stopped and jerked her head toward Bloodfur, feeling a flash of fear. Why did I tell him so much? I got so carried away... "Please don't tell Revengeheart any of that!" She pleaded. "Or anyone else!"

When Bloodfur seemed to hesitate, a feeling of dread washed over her, and she started to panic. *Have I been too quick to trust him?* "Please, Bloodfur!"

"I won't." He responded at last, meeting her gaze. "I promise, I won't tell any cat. You can trust me."

Mistybreeze found that she believed him. "I thought so." She slowly relaxed. "Thanks."

When she and Bloodfur reached a small clearing suitable for battle training, she saw how hesitant he seemed. "How about we keep our claws sheathed?" He suggested.

She hesitated. That was the way normal Clan warriors trained. But Poisonedsap made her followers do things differently. "Revengeheart wouldn't like that."

"Revengeheart isn't here." Bloodfur pointed out.

Mistybreeze hesitated. *That's true. I suppose it'll be fine.* "Okay, let's start." She crouched and fixed her eyes on him, ready for his attack.

"You can start." He meowed, much to her surprise.

"Okay." Mistybreeze narrowed her eyes and leaped at the tom. She never got the chance to strike first with other opponents. She saw this as a great opportunity to show just how strong she really was, in contrast to Revengeheart's claim. She rolled Bloodfur to the ground and braced for his reaction.

A little bat on the shoulder.

"What's wrong?" Mistybreeze blinked.

"Nothing." He gave himself a shake and sprang at her, pinning her and raising a paw, but Mistybreeze easily batted his head, and he retreated backwards. She leaped to her paws, partly amused, partly annoyed. *Does he think this is a game? Or does he think I'm too fragile for battle?* "For StarClan's sake, Bloodfur! I'm not a delicate kit! Treat me like a real enemy!"

Bloodfur aimed a blow to her head, but it was slow and clumsy. *He's doing this on purpose!* Irritated, she growled and attacked, pinning him on his back. *Does he think I'm weak like Revengeheart does? Is that why he's acting like I'm a kit?* "Come on, fight properly!"

"I can't." He admitted as he tried to free himself, but she was using all her strength, wanting to show him how capable she was.

"Why?" Mistybreeze flattened her ears in offense, a little hurt. "Do you think I'm weak too?"

Bloodfur's eyes flashed up at her in surprise. "No!" He exclaimed. "You're great at fighting, I just don't want to accidentally hurt you. You're my friend, and such a kind, beautiful cat..." He trailed off, seeming embarrassed.

Mistybreeze's grip loosened as she stared down at him, taken back by his words. Back when they were apprentices, he had hurt her when he ended his friendship with she and Coldpebble. She was sure he didn't care about her anymore. But now, they were friends

again, and he continued to prove he cared a lot for her. Not only that, but he admired her?

She couldn't suppress a purr of warmth. "You know, you're not like any of those other cats, Bloodfur." She leaned down and rubbed the side of her muzzle against his, and he purred back.

"What's going on?"

Revengeheart's snarl sent a jolt of alarm through her. She and Bloodfur immediately sprang apart, and she swung to the white tom. "We were training," She meowed nervously.

"It didn't look like *training* to me." He looked furious, his thick tail lashing as he approached them. "You already have a mate: *me!*" He pushed her aside with a massive shoulder, then stalked up to Bloodfur. "You'd better back off, or I'll rip your pelt off!" He snarled. "Got it?"

The dark red tabby nodded, looking afraid and intimidated by Revengeheart's fury. "Of course." He lowered his head. "Sorry."

Revengeheart didn't move, almost nose to nose with Bloodfur. Behind the white tom, Mistybreeze unsheathed her claws, ready to fight to defend her friend if Revengeheart dared attack him.

But to her relief, Revengeheart spun away from Bloodfur and nudged Mistybreeze roughly. "Let's go." He growled.

She didn't dare look back at Bloodfur as Revengeheart pushed her forward, but hoped he was okay. When they were a fair distance away from the clearing, Revengeheart glared at her. "What was that about?"

"We were only training." Mistybreeze growled, meeting his angry gaze. "If you're so upset seeing me alone with another tom, pair me up with Amberrose next time."

Clearly she spoke too freely, because Revengeheart swung his claws at her ears in response. The blow stung, but she showed no weakness as she narrowed her eyes at him.

"You're my mate." He growled at her. "You'd better remember that, or I'll make sure Coldpebble dies." He paused. "Bloodfur too." With that, he whipped around. "Come on, let's get back to the others."

Mistybreeze lowered her head as she followed him, her eyes narrowed. *You won't hurt any cat I care about. I don't know how just yet, but I'm going to fight against you to protect my kin and my Clan.*

Chapter 15

"Well done, Bloodfur. I knew I could trust you."

Mistybreeze grew uneasy as she noticed how proud Bloodfur looked at Deserve's praise. Her Clanmate had led Mottledface and a group of soldiers in an attack on the medicine cats at Highstones. She could hardly believe the cat she was beginning to trust again had been willing to help mortally wound the Clans' healers.

"Well, I wouldn't call it a success." Revengeheart said in a hostile tone, clearly not happy with Bloodfur after catching him training with Mistybreeze. "Only two medicine cats were killed. Dewstorm, Creamheart, Spicewhisker, Sagefern, and Ryeheart are still alive."

"But Spicewhisker isn't well," The ThunderClan warrior Battalon put in. "Sagefern has been coming by to check on him, and she says he might not pull through."

Deserve narrowed his green eyes. "Good. But the remainder must be eliminated."

Mistybreeze sat behind Revengeheart, feeling sick to her stomach as she listened to her companions talk about killing cats as if they were no more than leaves to be stepped on and crushed.

"ShadowClan has two medicine cats at the moment, right?" Deserve inquired.

"One." Bloodfur responded. "Dewstorm has left to fill in as WindClan's medicine cat."

Thank StarClan Dewstorm is alright. Mistybreeze was grateful that her uncle had survived the brutal attack. However WindClan's medicine cat, Silverberry had been killed, leaving WindClan without a medicine cat. Dewstorm had decided to leave ShadowClan to serve as WindClan's medicine cat. Every cat had

been surprised, but respected his decision. Though young, Creamheart was a worthy successor.

"Now we have Creamheart." Mottledface put in, echoing her thoughts. He paused and added with a tip of his head, "Brownstripe's daughter."

The Army leader's tail twitched, and his eyes flickered with interest. "Really?" Mistybreeze remembered hearing how seasons ago, Deserve, Boost, and Song had been taken into ShadowClan as kits, and were bullied by Brownstripe, Blackstorm, and Snakekit. The treatment had driven Deserve to kill Snakekit and flee the forest, becoming the bloodthirsty cat he was today. Deserve had already killed Brownstripe as well, but clearly he despised these cats enough to pursue their kin too.

"All the more reason to kill her." Deserve meowed in satisfaction. "ShadowClan must have no medicine cat. Bloodfur, will you do the job?"

Mistybreeze looked at Bloodfur uneasily. *He won't, will he?* Sitting not far from him, she saw his expression was unreadable. But he didn't answer right away, clearly considering his options. She felt a flicker of hope. *Maybe he'll refuse.*

But to her dismay, Bloodfur accepted the task. "Of course, Deserve. I'll take care of it tomorrow."

"Good." Deserve gave him a nod. "I shall call a meeting to discuss our next course of action." As he turned and leaped onto the tree stump, Clan cats and soldiers gathered more closely.

As the Army leader began speaking, Mistybreeze became aware of Swiftstalker sitting beside her. He leaned in close. "Do you really think Bloodfur will do it?" He whispered.

She looked at her paws. "I don't know." She admitted in a mutter. "There are two very different sides to him."

"Deserve, I believe we're capable of attacking at any time."

Mistybreeze's attention snapped up to the tree stump as Deserve's

son and second in command, Castiel, spoke. Beside her, Swiftstalker stiffened. *What if the Army attacks the Clans now? Tonight?* She held her breath as Deserve hesitated, considering his son's words. *No!*

"However, I believe we should wait until some of the other medicine cats are taken care of." Deserve decided. "Bloodfur will kill Creamheart tomorrow."

She relaxed a little, relieved. *There won't be an attack now.* She exchanged a look with Swiftstalker. But what do we do when the time comes?

"Good idea." Poisonedsap meowed when Ravenfeather proposed trying to kill Sagefern. "And I'd like to hold off the attack until my newest kits have sharpened their skills. They will be participating in the battle."

Mistybreeze bristled. *What? Is she crazy?* She thought of Poisonedsap's four tiny brown and ginger kits, who were barely 2 moons old. *How can she possibly expect them to fight, let alone survive a battle?* Without thinking, she stood and shot the queen a stunned look. "Surely you're not sending your kits into battle? They're too young!"

The golden brown she-cat narrowed her eyes at her. "No cat is too young to fight."

"That's not true!" Out of the corner of her eye, Swiftstalker gave her a warning look, but she ignored him. "Those kits are sure to be killed if you-"

"Mistybreeze." Revengeheart turned and glared at her. "I don't think a cat who won't have kits has any place in deciding what another mother should do with them," He growled scornfully. "You're no use here, so why don't you go catch me a mouse?"

Frustration pulsed over her from ears to paws. She met her mate's amber gaze, harsh words building up in her chest. *Your mother is a cruel mouse brain who's going to send her kits to their deaths! I don't need to be a mother to know the common sense of keeping kits alive! Go catch your own mouse and choke on it!*

But she knew nothing she said would result in any good. Especially when she was surrounded by enemies. She held her tongue, and suddenly feeling hopelessly defeated, she turned away, her tail drooping as she left the clearing.

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The forest surrounding Deserve's camp was dark and quiet. Mistybreeze wandered through the trees, her tail lashing slowly in frustration as she thought about Revengeheart and Poisonedsap. *They're such cruel, terrible cats!* They don't care who dies, whether it be an elder or a tiny kit! Sadness welled up in her chest. *How could I have been so stupid to fall into this mess?*

"Mistybreeze?"

She started, her claws instinctively unsheathing, but she relaxed when she recognized Swiftstalker's voice. The black and white tom padded up to her. "Are you okay?" He asked quietly.

"I'm fine," She muttered. "Is the meeting over?"

Swiftstalker nodded. "We'll be leaving soon. I think Poisonedsap wanted to talk to Deserve first, and Revengeheart went to make dirt." He hesitated. "I've learned it's best not to argue with Poisonedsap. She won't listen to any cat."

"Those kits are going to die in battle," She growled. "Do we just let that happen?"

The blue eyed tom shrugged sadly. "Not much can be done. Even Cougarfoot has no say in things." He looked at his paws. "I guess we just-" He suddenly broke off, his pink nose twitching.

Mistybreeze's ears pricked warily as she tasted the air herself.

Blood.

She exchanged a worried look with Swiftstalker, and they both hurried through the trees south of the camp, following the salty reek of blood. What happened? A fight between a Clan cat and soldier?

They passed a patch of brambles and stopped in their tracks, shocked. "Bloodfur?" She gasped out in alarm.

Their dark red tabby Clanmate was stumbling through the forest, his head craned low. He glanced over at them in faint surprise. "Oh, hi guys."

Mistybreeze shot to his side, horrified to see his neck and throat dark and slick with fresh blood. "What happened?" She demanded anxiously. "Who-"

"He can tell us later." Swiftstalker cut her off urgently and pressed his shoulder to Bloodfur's side. "We need to get him to the camp, Deserve's healers will see him."

Knowing Swiftstalker was right and there was no time to waste, Mistybreeze supported Bloodfur on his other side, and together she and Swiftstalker guided him toward the camp. As they moved, her fur prickled when a familiar scent on Bloodfur hit her nose. *Revengeheart.*

***

"You're awfully lucky, Clan cat." Coco commented. "If you'd been ripped into any deeper, you'd be fresh kill."

Mistybreeze and Swiftstalker sat in the healers' den, watching as Deserve's healers leaned over their friend. Bloodfur lay in a nest of leaves and moss while Coco, a dark brown tabby, pressed cobwebs along his throat wound. Beside her sat Shimmer, a silver spotted she-cat who was handing pawfuls of fresh webbing when Coco needed it.

"But he'll be okay?" Mistybreeze pressed, looking at her friend worriedly.

"He should be fine." Shimmer meowed. "How are you feeling, Blood? Your name sure suits you today." She chuckled.

Bloodfur seemed too distracted by his wound to get frustrated about the jab at his name which he hated. He hauled himself to his paws and sat up hunched over. "I'm okay," He rasped. "Thanks."

"Bloodfur, who attacked you?" Mistybreeze asked, though she feared she already knew the answer. "What happened?"

The tabby hesitated. "I got in a... disagreement with Revengeheart." He admitted.

"About what?" Swiftstalker blinked. "The medicine cats?"

Did he change his mind about killing Creamheart? Mistybreeze wondered. *And Revengeheart didn't like that?*

He started to shake his head, only to stop and wince as the movement hurt his wound. "I was really mad about what he said to you." His yellow eyes met Mistybreeze's. "I told him he should treat you better, and he didn't like that very much."

Mistybreeze stared down at him, startled by this answer. *He was almost killed because he stood up for me?* "Why would you do that?" She anxiously demanded.

"Because I care about you." Bloodfur mewed simply, looking tired from his injury.

As Swiftstalker urged Bloodfur to be careful of confronting Revengeheart, Mistybreeze's tail lashed slowly. She looked out into the clearing, narrowing her eyes. Where is he?

"I'll be right back." She told her companions and padded out into the clearing.

"You'll have to start seeing us more often, once all your Clan healers are gone!" Shimmer chuckled as she left. Swiftstalker laughed dryly in response.

Poisonedsap was speaking with Sunset and Mottledface. She stalked up to them more confidently than ever.

"I'm expecting kits now." Sunset, one of Deserve's soldiers, was boasting. "They'll fight in the battle and-"

"Where's Revengeheart?" Mistybreeze cut them off.

Three sets of narrowed eyes rested on her. "I think he's headed back to the forest already." Poisonedsap responded coolly.

"Why?" Mottledface prompted with a gleam in his eye. "Finally going to have those kits?"

As the three cats purred together in amusement, Mistybreeze hardly cared and hurried through the camp and out into the forest. It wasn't long before she spotted the black legged tom up ahead through the trees. Eyes narrowing, she quickened her pace. "Revengeheart!" She called out coldly.

The tom paused, glancing over his shoulder at her. "Well, well, took you long enough!" He snorted, then noticed she was empty pawed. "Where's my mouse? Or are you incapable of hunting too?"

Gritting her teeth, Mistybreeze stalked up to him. "Bloodfur came back to camp badly wounded."

Revengeheart's ear twitched. "That's a shame."

"You tried to kill him."

He narrowed his eyes and turned to face her. "So what if I did? If he wants to keep his throat intact, he should keep his nose out of our business."

Hot anger pulsed through Mistybreeze's pelt, and she dug her claws into the ground. "Leave him alone." She growled. "He's a part of our alliance, after all. What good is he to us if he's dead?"

Revengeheart looked amused at her show of strength. "I'll do what I like. And don't talk as if you're part of this. You've made it clear you're completely worthless to us." Lashing his tail, he went on. "At this point, all we want you to do is keep quiet."

A growl rumbled in her throat. "Why not just kill me then?" She challenged.

"Because." Revengeheart's eyes burned into hers with hatred and satisfaction. "I want you to see the Clans fall. I want you to see every cat you care about die in front of you. I can't wait for you to

see how powerful we are, and how worthless and alone you will be when all this is over."

His dark words sent a chill down her spine. But she wasn't afraid. She glared back at him steadily. "I can't wait for you to see just how wrong you are." Without waiting for his response, she spun and hurried back toward Deserve's camp.

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Early the next morning, Mistybreeze padded through the forest. The sun had just begun to rise, its warm rays reaching out between the dark pines. She enjoyed the cool morning grass under her paws, and the soft breeze against her fur.

Revengeheart had asked her to go catch him some prey, since she didn't do that yesterday at Deserve's camp. But she had no intentions of catching so much as a mouse tail for him. Instead, she used this as an opportunity to relax and enjoy a morning stroll.

As the trees in front of her thinned out to an open grassy area, Mistybreeze closed her eyes, relishing in the calming quiet of the morning. Even the prey hardly stirred yet. It felt good to be alone with her thoughts.

A breeze touched her nose, carrying with it a familiar scent. She opened her eyes, surprised, and looked ahead toward the WindClan border. Sure enough, in the distance on the moor crouched a familiar spotted gray tom.

"Dewstorm!" Mistybreeze called out warmly and trotted toward the border. She hadn't seen her uncle since he'd left to join WindClan.

He looked up from the bundle of leaves he'd been sorting, his yellow eyes brightening. "Mistybreeze!" He checked that his herbs would be safe, then left them to meet her at the border. "It's good to see you." He purred.

"How are you?" She asked. "What's it like living in WindClan?"

Dewstorm hesitated. "It's different." He admitted. "Getting used to a new home, especially one without trees, is taking some time. But I

think I'll grow to like it."

"Are the WindClan cats treating you well?" In ShadowClan, Dewstorm had been very respected and a friend to all. She guessed it would take some time, but hoped he would be treated the same in WindClan.

"Well..." Dewstorm tipped his head. "A pawful of them are. Monarchwing and Blazinglight have been very kind in helping me settle in. Gladestar has told me multiple times how grateful WindClan is to have me there, when they would have been left without a medicine cat." He let out a half amused purr. "Though I don't think she speaks for every WindClan cat. Some of them look at me like I'm a fox in a cat's pelt."

Mistybreeze blinked sympathetically. "I'm sure they'll grow to respect you as much as we do."

"Probably only once I train an apprentice for them." Dewstorm meowed. "But I'll win them over, treating one cough or cut at a time!" He purred, curling his tail.

I'm glad he's in such good spirits. She thought with a purr.

"How are things in ShadowClan?" He asked.

Mistybreeze sat down, trying not to think of Poisonedsap and Revengeheart. "They're alright," She meowed carefully. "Creamheart has been doing a great job on her own."

"I had no doubts." Dewstorm's eyes gleamed proudly at the mention of his apprentice. "She's a great medicine cat and will serve her Clan well."

Not for long, if Bloodfur kills her... Suddenly the calming mood of her morning outing was gone. Her stomach turned like rotten prey as she thought of Creamheart's fate. *Bloodfur is supposed to do that today. Will he really kill her?*

Suddenly, Dewstorm's expression grew more serious. "I'm glad I ran into you. I actually have a message for you. I planned to tell you at the gathering last night, but you weren't there."

Because I was at Deserve's camp, listening to traitors plot against the Clans. Mistybreeze thought. She blinked at the medicine cat, puzzled. "A message? From who?" *I don't know any WindClan cats that well.*

"Diamondrain."

Diamondrain? She felt unsteady on her paws, shocked to hear her dead mother's name. She sometimes forgot that unlike regular cats, medicine cats could communicate with the dead. "Diamondrain?" She rasped, a mixture of sadness and wonder filling her chest. "Really?"

Her uncle nodded. "She said..." He leaned closer. "You are stronger than ever now, but you don't have to fight alone. You are one of three cats whose loyalties will be proven under a full moon. I'm so proud of you, and I will be with you always as you fight for the Clans."

Mistybreeze grew misty eyed as she listened to Dewstorm's message. She imagined and could almost hear her mother saying these words as if she herself was speaking them, in the soft and comforting voice she would use when she was a kit. *Oh, Diamondrain... I miss you so much.*

As she stared into the distance, processing the words, Dewstorm spoke again more quietly. "I don't know what any of that means, but I'm sure you do." He paused. "Every cat knows I broke the warrior code by loving Starfaith. I know loyalties can be more complicated than some cats think. Follow your heart, and fight for what you believe in. Diamondrain already knows that you will."

As Mistybreeze nodded slowly, Dewstorm rose to his paws. "I have to get those herbs back to camp." He touched his nose to hers. "Take care, Mistybreeze. Even though I'm a WindClan cat now, we're still kin. I'll always be here for you and your brother."

"Thank you." Mistybreeze gave a small purr and watched as the medicine cat turned and hurried back across the moor.

***

The sun had fully risen now. Mistybreeze gazed downward, deep in thought as she slowly headed through the pines toward the camp. She felt comfort in knowing her mother was watching over her, that she knew what she was struggling with. *She's proud of me and thinks I'm stronger than ever... I guess I have stopped letting Revengeheart push me around. But I'm still involved in this plot to attack the Clans!*

You are one of three cats whose loyalties will be proven under a full moon... Obviously that means something will happen at a gathering, right? Or maybe Deserve's camp, since we go there on full moons? Who are the other two cats? It has to be Swiftstalker, and... Bloodfur? But is that too simple?

Bloodfur is a good cat. Mistybreeze thought. *I really think he is. He can change, and then maybe the three of us can do something to help the Clans...* She quickened her pace through the trees. *I have to talk to him.* She decided. *I have to talk him out of killing Creamheart and make him see sense.*

As she neared the camp, she stopped in her tracks. The sounds of cries and wails of grief echoed from beyond the thorn barrier, and the scent of blood lingered in the air. Her blood ran cold. *Oh no... Am I too late? Bloodfur, you didn't...*

Mistybreeze swallowed hard, her heart pounding before she hurried through the tunnel and into the camp, preparing herself to see Creamheart's body laying in the clearing. But when stepped into the clearing, an unexpected tragedy awaited her.

The medicine cat Creamheart was alive, crouched beside Bloodfur. Flameheart, Bloomfire, Heatpaw, Foxpaw, and Applepaw were with them, crying and wailing in grief. In the center of the group lay Cardinalpaw, his throat dark with blood. Around them, the ShadowClan cats yowled and argued.

"We all know who did this!" Crowmask yowled. "The same cat who murdered all our other Clanmates!"

"Enough of that nonsense!" Flameheart angrily rose his head from his son's body. "Bloodfur is not a murderer!"

As Mistybreeze took in the scene, wildly confused and horrified, she saw Revengeheart, Mottledface, and Amberrose not far from her by the camp wall. She rushed over to them. "What happened?" She demanded, desperate for answers. Revengeheart glared at her, but didn't speak.

"Obviously Bloodfur messed up!" Mottledface hissed through gritted teeth.

Amberrose rolled her eyes. "The idiot killed his old apprentice instead of Creamheart!"

"Enough!" Depthstar silenced the Clan and wove through the crowd to the huddle of grieving cats. "Bloodfur? Creamheart?" He asked sadly. "What happened? Who did this?"

Creamheart shot Bloodfur a glare. "It was-"

"Me." Bloodfur stared at the ground before his paws. "It was me."

As the Clan screeched and yowled their shock and anger, Mistybreeze couldn't suppress a gasp. Killing Creamheart would have surprised her enough. But Cardinalpaw? She had seen how close Bloodfur had been with his apprentice, and adopted brother since he was a kit. Since joining Poisonedsap's alliance, Bloodfur rejected Cardinalpaw as both his kin and apprentice. But did he really hate him enough to kill him?

"I knew you hated us," Applepaw wailed, echoing Mistybreeze's thoughts. "But I didn't think you would *kill* one of us!"

Bloodfur's eyes lit with heartache. "I don't hate you!" He started toward them, but Cobratail and Crowmask blocked his way. "I didn't mean it!" He cried. "I never meant to kill him!"

The pain and desperation in Bloodfur's voice broke Mistybreeze's heart. She had no doubt he was being honest. Whatever happened here had been a horrible accident, and Bloodfur was grieving for Cardinalpaw just as much as the rest of his family.

"No, you meant to kill *me!"* Creamheart hissed at him. "And you would have, but Cardinalpaw jumped in the way!"

As the Clan roared in fury, understanding dawned on Mistybreeze. Of course. Cardinalpaw had sacrificed himself for the young medicine cat. But her sympathy for Bloodfur was joined with disappointment. *So he was really going to kill Creamheart...*

Cobratail cut Bloodfur off as he pleaded with him. "Enough, Bloodfur. You've betrayed us all. You tried to kill our medicine cat!"

"Hawkfeather was right!"

"The kit born in blood tried to destroy our clan!"

"I'm sorry!" Bloodfur yowled, his yellow eyes blazing with desperation. "I swear, I'm sorry! I didn't want this! Please, you-"

"Silence!" Depthstar faced the warrior, his dark eyes narrowed. "You have betrayed ShadowClan, Bloodfur," He growled. "What you've done is unforgivable. I exile you from ShadowClan. If any cat catches you on our territory, they have my permission to kill you."

Mistybreeze's heart skipped a beat, her eyes widening in shock. *Exile?*

Bloodfur looked shaken. "But-"

"Leave!" Depthstar snarled, looking more enraged than Mistybreeze had ever seen him. "Or I'll kill you myself!"

The Clan growled as they watched Bloodfur. Tails lashed and claws unsheathed. They were ready to attack him and drive him out by force if her refused. "I really am sorry." He whispered, but silence answered him. He hung his head, tail drooping as he padded through the crowd.

"Piece of fox dung!" Crowmask pushed Bloodfur with an unsheathed paw.

Cliffshade spat. "Traitor!"

"Never come back!" Ashcloud growled.

Bloodfur hardly seemed to hear them. He continued onward, head

bowed as he left the camp. After he disappeared, many cats kept their eyes slitted and fixed on the shadowy tunnel, as if thinking he might turn back. When the red tabby didn't appear again, the cats turned their focus on Cardinalpaw.

'I can't believe..." Bloomfire was sobbing heavily. Flameheart pressed against her, looking just as lost and hurt.

Depthstar drew in a deep breath, his dark blue fur slowly flattening. "Our Clan is safe now," He announced. "We will sit vigil with Cardinalpaw tonight."

While Mistybreeze grieved for Cardinalpaw and disapproved of Bloodfur's actions, she felt terribly sorry for him. Glancing around to make sure no cat spotted her, she slipped out of the camp. Bloodfur hadn't gone far yet. He was further up ahead, his tail dragging in the pine needles as he walked slowly.

"Bloodfur..." She caught up to him, and he paused, but didn't look at her. His eyes were dull and fixed on the ground. It hurt to see him so defeated. "I'm so sorry." She sat down and leaned against him. "It was an accident." She quietly pointed out. "You were trying to kill Creamheart."

"I shouldn't have been trying to kill anyone." Bloodfur murmured and moved away from her. "I have to leave."

"Where will you go?" She asked quietly.

Bloodfur didn't respond right away. "I don't know," He mumbled. "I guess I'm a rogue now. I'll find some place to go." He continued slowly through the trees. "Goodbye, Mistybreeze." He rasped without looking back.

"Goodbye..." Mistybreeze stared after him sadly, her heart heavy as a stone in her chest. She watched until his dark tabby pelt disappeared into the distance. *He was one of the few cats I trusted... What will I do without him?*

"Has he gone already?" Swiftstalker padded to her side, looking out into the trees solemnly. "I... I wanted to say goodbye."

She gave a tiny nod. "He's gone."

It was quiet for a long time as she and Swiftstalker sat side by side, watching the forest as if half expecting Bloodfur would reappear.

"It's not fair." Swiftstalker broke the silence. "He never wanted to be a part of this. He always wanted to be accepted for the cat he was, and show the Clan he wasn't the cat Hawkfeather saw. Instead, Revengeheart made him show the Clan the exact opposite."

"At least he's free from Poisonedsap's plot now." Mistybreeze murmured. A thought crossed her mind. "What if we go with him?"

Swiftstalker shot her a surprised look. "What?"

"We can all be away from this mess." Mistybreeze pointed out, not putting much thought into the idea. But it sounded nice. "The three of us can live as rogues. We might not be warriors anymore, but we would live a carefree life, free of pain and fear and bullies."

The black and white tom shook his head. "Life can never be carefree. If there were nothing to care about, no risks worth taking, what would be the point?"

She flicked him on the shoulder with her tail. "Okay, true. But most cats don't have to deal with being involved with murder. We can escape that part, can't we?"

Swiftstalker looked up at the bright blue sky as a sparrow flew overhead and into the distance. "I've always longed to be free from my mother and her plan." He admitted. "When I was a kit, after I saw her kill Maplefur, I wanted to run away. But I didn't. Because I knew I had to protect ShadowClan. I didn't run away then, and I won't now, or all of this was for nothing."

Mistybreeze knew he was right. Her idea of leaving the Clan had been a fleeting thought, a fantasy of an easy way out. Remembering Diamondrain's message, she knew she belonged with her Clan. "You're right." She meowed quietly. "We will put a stop to all this. I know we will."

Chapter 16

"Applepaw, from this moment on you will be known as Applefall. StarClan honors your strength and patience, and we welcome you as a full warrior of ShadowClan."

"Applefall! Heatstorm! Foxflower!"

As the Clan called out their new names, the golden yellow tabby she-cat dipped her head before she stepped back to join her siblings. A warrior ceremony was often the happiest moment of a young cat's life. But their eyes lacked the light of excitement and pride that was supposed to come with it.

As Mistybreeze watched from the outskirts of the crowd, she knew solemnly that their special day had been shadowed by the loss of Cardinalpaw. It had been one moon since his death. After Depthstar touched his nose to each of the new warriors, Flameheart and Bloomfire stepped forward to congratulate their kits. Though they certainly looked proud, Mistybreeze knew they wished Cardinalpaw had been named a warrior among their other kits.

Echoing Mistybreeze's thoughts, Applefall exchanged a sad look with Foxflower. "I wish Cardinalpaw were here." She murmured.

As her sister nodded agreement, Creamheart took a step toward them. "Cardinalpaw is watching over you from StarClan." She meowed gently. "I'm sure he's very proud of you."

"He'd be here if it weren't for Bloodfur." Heatstorm grumbled, flexing his claws.

"Hmmph. I still can't believe Bloodfur messed up so badly." Revengeheart growled to Foxshadow not far from Mistybreeze.

The dark furred tom scoffed. "Deserve should have known better than to trust him with the task. I guess at least there's one less cat in

ShadowClan we have to worry about, even if he wasn't important."

Mistybreeze flattened her ears, disgusted as she listened to the toms talk about Cardinalpaw's death so dismissively.

"Speaking of unimportant..." Foxshadow muttered as Ebonypaw bounded across the camp toward them.

"Revengeheart?" Ebonypaw prompted rather hesitantly, her tail low as she approached her mentor. "Can we go for a training session today?"

"No." Revengeheart growled dismissively. "Get back to clearing the elder's bedding."

The dark tabby she-cat shuffled her paws. "B-but I've been doing it for days." She pointed out. "Swiftstalker is out with Flintpaw right now. Why can't we-"

"I said, no!" The white tom hissed, startling her. "Get back to work. Do the warriors' den next or the nursery."

He doesn't care one bit about mentoring her! Mistybreeze glared at him. *He just wants to send her off to do tasks to look like he's mentoring when he actually isn't.* She rose to her paws. "I can take you out, Ebony-"

"I'm sorry? Are you her mentor?" Revengeheart shot Mistybreeze a hot glare, which she returned crossly. "Do your work, Ebonypaw. Or do you want me to tell Depthstar you're not listening to me?"

Ebonypaw's tail drooped, and a look of mingled sadness and frustration crossed her face. Mistybreeze felt terribly sorry for the apprentice and watched as she turned away, head low as she headed for the warriors' den.

"She's so annoying!" Revengeheart groaned. "I can't wait to get rid of her." He grew quiet, his eyes slowly narrowing. He was thinking. That look made Mistybreeze nervous. Then he let out a purr. "I'd like to make a trip to see Deserve tonight."

***

That night, Mistybreeze padded beside Swiftstalker behind Blackstorm and Revengeheart, making the long trek to Deserve's camp. She felt sick to her stomach as she wondered what Revengeheart could be planning to do with Ebonypaw. Unfortunately they had slipped away so quickly, she hadn't had time to tell Swiftstalker her concerns, and she didn't dare whisper to him now in case the others heard.

As they ventured deeper into Deserve's territory, a black tom emerged from the bushes. It was Crow. "What do you want?" He demanded. "We weren't expecting a visit tonight."

Revengeheart paused and gave him a nod. "I have matters to discuss with Deserve."

Crow's amber eyes narrowed. "Fine." He lashed his tail and led the ShadowClan cats toward the camp.

When they entered the camp, several cats glanced toward them in surprise.

"Revengeheart, good to see you!" Bonfire purred.

"Welcome." Sunset, who Mistybreeze realized was heavily pregnant, gave the cats a nod.

Revengeheart gave each of them a curt nod before Deserve reached them. "I wasn't expecting Clan visitors tonight." He commented, studying them. "Do you have news?"

"No, but I'd like to ask for your help." Revengeheart replied, twitching an ear. "Can we talk privately?"

Deserve's green eyes flickered with curiosity. He nodded and turned, leading the black legged tom to his den.

Suddenly out of the corner of her eye, Mistybreeze saw a familiar dark red pelt. She turned her head and her heart leapt. She could hardly believe her eyes. "Bloodfur!"

To her astonishment, her former Clanmate was padding toward her from across the clearing. He looked much thinner than when she

had last seen him, and his yellow eyes were dull with depression.

She stepped forward to meet him and purred as she bumped her head against his. "What are you doing here?" *Has the army taken him prisoner? He looks so unkept!*

Bloodfur purred back. "I couldn't live as a rogue. I had to stay in a group, and Deserve welcomed me." He looked at Swiftstalker. "How is the Clan?"

"They're well." Swiftstalker replied hesitantly. "Bloomfire's kits have become warriors."

Bloodfur seemed to brighten at that news. "That's great! What are their names?"

"Heatstorm, Foxflower, and Applefall," The black and white tom responded.

"Those are great names." Sadness glazed over his expression. "I miss them."

Mistybreeze gazed at him sympathetically. "Why are you here?" She asked quietly. "You should be with the Clan."

Bloodfur shook his head. "No," He rasped, though his voice was rich with longing and regret. "I'm a soldier now."

"No, you're not," Mistybreeze protested. "You're a warrior of ShadowClan!" *He doesn't belong here, with these vengeful cats.*

Bloodfur dropped his gaze. "They exiled me, and they all think I'm a horrible cat."

"Do you think everything you've done since Revengeheart recruited you is making them think differently?" Mistybreeze demanded, being as honest with him as she could. "You've been doing a lot of terrible things. But you were just blinded by anger and grief, and Revengeheart brought out the worst in you. You're a good cat, Bloodfur. You just need to show the Clan that."

Bloodfur didn't respond and changed the subject. "Why are you

here?"

Before she or Swiftstalker could respond, Deserve emerged from his den with Revengeheart. "Very well," The rogue leader meowed. "I'll send a patrol tonight."

Beside Mistybreeze, Swiftstalker swallowed nervously. "What did you do?"

Revengeheart purred. "I found a solution to getting rid of our apprentices."

As Mistybreeze's heart dropped like a rock, Swiftstalker's eyes widened. "What? B-but Flintpaw and Ebonypaw could be useful to us!" He argued desperately. "We could recruit them and-"

"Don't be ridiculous!" Revengeheart spat at his brother. "Those apprentices are a waste of our time, and they're weak! The sooner they're dead, the better."

"No!" Swiftstalker stared in dismay.

Deserve had turned to his soldiers. Clearly there was no changing any cat's mind. "Castiel, you can lead the patrol to the burnt sycamore just across the thunderpath. Revengeheart has arranged for the apprentices to be there tonight for a training session."

"Yes, Deserve." Castiel replied. "Papercut, Bonfire, Patch, come with me." He looked at Revengeheart. "Lead the way."

As Revengeheart and Blackstorm exited the camp with the soldiers following, Mistybreeze exchanged a distressed look with Swiftstalker. There was nothing they could do. The black and white tom let out a sigh as he followed the group.

Mistybreeze looked back at Bloodfur, meeting his sad yellow gaze. *Please come back.* She silently willed him. *You're not like these cats.* Pulling her gaze away, she followed the others.

***

When they reached the edge of ShadowClan territory, Castiel and

his soldiers looked eager for bloodshed. "You say the apprentices are already there at the burnt sycamore?" The silver tabby asked.

Revengeheart nodded, looking amused. "They think Swiftstalker and I are coming to train them."

Beside him, Bonfire chuckled. "They're in for a nice surprise then!"

"Right. Let's go." With a wave of his tail, Castiel ran into the forest, Blackstorm, Bonfire, and Papercut following.

Revengeheart glared back at Mistybreeze and Swiftstalker. "You two can go back to camp if you want." He growled. "And don't even *think* about doing anything." He ran off into the shadows after the others.

Immediately, Swiftstalker took off toward the ShadowClan camp. "Come on." He meowed as Mistybreeze hurried after him. "We're going to do something."

***

When they reached the camp, most cats were already asleep. Song and Cliffshade were guarding the camp and looked surprised as Mistybreeze and Swiftstalker sprinted past them.

"Where have you two b-" Song stopped, her eyes widening as she scented them. Mistybreeze didn't stop to think about it.

They rushed to the centre of the camp, and Swiftstalker's gaze flashed around. "Where's Cobratail?"

"Cobratail is sleeping." Timberstorm yawned as he emerged from the dirtplace. "I know because he's snoring like a badger and I haven't gotten a wink of-"

"We need a patrol to check out the burnt sycamore immediately." Swiftstalker meowed urgently.

Timberstorm blinked. "*Now?* What for?"

"There's... Uh-" Swiftstalker's eyes darted as he thought.

"ThunderClan!" Mistybreeze jumped in urgently. "We've scented ThunderClan on our side of the border and heard rustling in the bushes. We might be under attack!"

The brown tabby bristled. "Why didn't you start with that?" He exclaimed. He ran toward the thorn tunnel. "Cliffshade, Song! We need to check the border for signs of ThunderClan right now."

As the three cats hurried through the forest, Swiftstalker sighed in relief. "Quick thinking." He meowed. Anxiety lit his blue eyes. "I only hope they can stop them."

***

It felt like moons as Mistybreeze and Swiftstalker waited near the warriors' den. *What could be happening?* She wondered anxiously. *Did they find them? Were they too late? Are the warriors dead too?*

At last, Timberstorm entered the camp. His eyes were lit with grief and anger. The scent of blood filled the air as Song followed, dragging Flintpaw by the scruff. The apprentice was limp and lifeless, his neck soaked in blood. Next came Cliffshade, who carried Ebonypaw across his shoulders. She had a horrible belly wound, leaving his back streaked in crimson.

They were too late... Mistybreeze's heart sank in defeat. *They're both dead!*

But as Cliffshade carefully lowered Ebonypaw's body to the ground, she let out a moan. *She's alive!* "Creamheart!" The gray and brown warrior yowled as he pressed close to his daughter. "Hurry, we need help!"

Song touched her nose to Flintpaw as she lay him near his sister. Beside Mistybreeze, Swiftstalker let out a cry of grief and left her to see his apprentice. "I'm sorry..." He whispered as he crouched beside Flintpaw.

The rest of the Clan was quickly awakening, startled and horrified to see what was happening. Creamheart had rushed to Ebonypaw's side, pressing cobwebs along her long belly wound. "It's alright,

Ebonypaw!" She meowed, panic edging her voice. "Relax and keep still."

"Ebonypaw? Flintpaw?" Greenpine's fur bristled with terror as she saw her kits laying bloody in the camp. She raced to Flintpaw and desperately prodded him with her paws and muzzle. "No, no!" She shrieked. She swung her head toward Cliffshade. "He's-"

"I know." Cliffshade choked, his amber eyes lit with distress. Mistybreeze could tell he hadn't taken a moment to process or grieve for Flintpaw yet. "There's no time right now, Greenpine. Ebonypaw is still alive, and she still needs us."

The brown tabby she-cat stumbled away from her son to join him, crying out when she saw Ebonypaw's wound. "Oh, Ebonypaw!" She gently licked her daughter's head as Creamheart worked to stop the bleeding. "Stay strong, my brave warrior."

Mistybreeze trembled with anger as Revengeheart entered the camp carrying a mouse. He dropped it, staring in fake shock at the scene. "What happened?" He demanded anxiously, hurrying toward Ebonypaw. "Who killed my apprentice?"

"She isn't dead!" Cliffshade glared at him, his voice trembling. "She's going to be fine."

Revengeheart frowned, faking a look of deep sympathy as he bowed his head. "I know it's hard, but not even StarClan can heal everyone sometimes."

"*I* can heal her, Revengeheart." Creamheart replied as she focused her attention on plastering Ebonypaw's belly with cobwebs. "It's bad, but she'll pull through."

Mistybreeze felt satisfied by the look of disbelief and anger on Revengeheart's face. He was silent for a moment before he forced a purr. "I'm glad to hear that."

Depthstar's voice rose among the anxious murmuring and cries among the Clan. Mistybreeze looked up to see he had taken his place on the meeting rock. "What has happened?" He demanded.

"Who attacked these apprentices?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Crowmask rose his voice. "Bloodfur! He must still be lurking around our territory, taking his vengeance on us!"

Cliffshade bristled. "I'll flay that piece of fox dung!"

"It wasn't Bloodfur!" Timberstorm spoke up. Every cat went silent to hear him. "When we reached the burnt sycamore, three rogues were retreating. There was only rogue scent."

"Bloodfur is a rogue now," Ashcloud pointed out.

"Right, but there were no red tabbies among them." Timberstorm added. "He wasn't responsible for this attack."

Boost exchanged a look with Tinylark. "Could we have been wrong before?"

"It's obvious Bloodfur is still responsible." Poisonedsap spoke from outside the nursery. "It seems he's made some rogue friends to do his dirty work."

"Hold on a moment." Cobratail was sitting beside the meeting rock, looking thoughtful. "Maplefur was killed when Bloodfur was just a kit. He couldn't have been responsible for that. We all figured a rogue killed him after the battle with ThunderClan. Why couldn't this have been rogues too? Or... Even some of the other killings."

The camp was quiet for a while. Mistybreeze exchanged a look with Swiftstalker, wondering if the Clan was truely starting to realize Bloodfur's innocence.

"He confessed to killing Cardinalpaw," Crowmask argued, but even he looked conflicted. "Surely he must have killed before then?"

"Of course he did!" Foxshadow hissed.

"Yeah, he's a murderer!" Blackstorm added.

"That's enough." Depthstar meowed. The Clan leader looked deep in thought, considering Cobratail's words. After a moment, he spoke

again. "Cobratail, please send out a patrol to make sure the rogues have left our territory. We will hold a vigil for Flintpaw tonight." He looked down at Ebonypaw, whose bleeding had stopped now. Creamheart was doing a great job managing the wound. "Ebonypaw is in Creamheart's care, and I'm confident she will survive this."

As the Clan slowly calmed, many conversed quietly, wondering about rogues and Bloodfur, and murmuring their grief for Flintpaw.

Mistybreeze looked at Swiftstalker. "Do you think they'll realize Bloodfur isn't responsible for the other deaths?" She asked hopefully. "And maybe he'll be allowed back into the Clan?"

Her friend shook his head. "I hope so... But he still *did* kill Cardinalpaw. That might be enough to keep him in exile."

That was true. Mistybreeze looked up sadly. A few dull stars hung in the dark sky above. She wondered if the warriors of StarClan were watching over them. Did they know how this would end? Would she and Swiftstalker be free of Poisonedsap's plot? Would Bloodfur return to ShadowClan?

"If we ever get out of this mess..." Mistybreeze murmured. "I'd like to be closer with Bloodfur. I'd like to hunt for fun and for my Clan, not for Revengeheart, and I want to spend more time with Coldpebble."

Swiftstalker followed her gaze. "I'd like to hunt for my Clan too. I've always wanted to be a regular loyal Clan warrior." He paused. "I want to be a better friend to Bloodfur if he can come back." He let out a purr. "I like kits. Who knows, maybe I'll have a mate and kits someday? I've never had the chance to think about those things."

She leaned against him reassuringly. "Hopefully we both have a better path ahead of us."

It was quiet for a long moment. Suddenly, a white she-cat stepped in front of them. "Mistybreeze, Swiftstalker?" Song murmured, glancing around to make sure no cat heard.

"Yes?" Mistybreeze blinked.

Song's blue eyes were worried. "I could scent it when you returned to camp." She whispered. "You've been visiting my brother, haven't you?"

"I-I-" Swiftstalker looked alarmed.

"Tomorrow, please take me with you to see him." Song's eyes glistened. "I want to speak with Deserve."

Chapter 17

The sun was sinking in the sky. A cool breeze ruffled Mistybreeze's fur as she walked with the other Clan allies toward Deserve's camp. Revengeheart seemed extra frustrated since the attack on the apprentices yesterday had left Ebonypaw alive.

"We failed with the medicine cats, too!" Revengeheart had hissed in frustration. "There's no more time for failure." He had gathered most of the Clan allies and insisted they go see Deserve tonight, to come up with a final plan. Only Poisonedsap remained at camp, nursing her kits.

The ShadowClan allies had been surprised and suspicious when Swiftstalker and Mistybreeze had awkwardly introduced Song as wanting to visit the army. Stripednose had insisted on coming with her too. The look of anger on Revengeheart's face had told Mistybreeze he wanted nothing more than to kill the white she-cat and her mate and get on with his day, but there was no time for covering up more murders, and his patience was dwindling. He had grunted allowing Song and Stripednose to come with them tonight.

Mistybreeze was flanked by Swiftstalker and Song as they neared Deserve's camp. The white she-cat looked uneasy as she scanned the cats around her. "Are all these cats... Really betraying the Clans?" She whispered, shaken.

"Yes." She murmured, unsure of what else to say. She didn't want Song to be any more involved than she already was. Her gaze flicked to her swollen belly. "Shouldn't you have stayed at camp? Your kits are due any time now..."

Song shook her head. "I'm fine," She assured her. "This is important." Her gaze clouded. "I thought I scented Deserve on some

of the bodies before," She admitted. "But I hoped I was imagining it. I can't believe my brother has changed so much and brought so much death to the Clans."

"What will you say to him?" Swiftstalker asked quietly. Mistybreeze was just as curious.

Their Clanmate hesitated. "I'll talk to him. Despite everything, he is still my brother." Her blue eyes filled with determination. "If anyone can persuade him to change his ways, I can."

Mistybreeze exchanged a wary look with Swiftstalker. Did she really realize how terrible Deserve had become? What could she possibly say that could sway the bloodthirsty leader?

Stripednose padded closer to his mate. "If things start looking bad, I mean, worse than they already do, we're getting out of here," He meowed worriedly. "I don't want anything to happen to you."

"Deserve is still my brother." Song repeated. "I don't believe he'd hurt me." Though she sounded unsure.

As they entered Deserve's camp, Stripednose's fur bristled, ready to defend himself and his mate. Mistybreeze looked at Song nervously, hoping she had made the right decision by coming.

Revengeheart led the way and yowled. "Deserve! There are some cats here who want to speak with you."

As the Clan cats filed into the clearing, several soldiers cast them surprised looks. Mistybreeze and Swiftstalker moved toward the edge of the camp. She guessed her friend was feeling just as worried about Song being here. Revengeheart looked annoyed, clearly wanting Song to get her business with Deserve over with. Scanning the soldiers, she caught a glimpse of Bloodfur, staring at her and obviously surprised to see her.

Deserve emerged from his den. When he saw Song, he stopped in his tracks, his eyes lighting with surprise. "Song?"

The soldiers exchanged curious looks as Deserve padded toward his sister. As he neared, Stripednose dug his claws into the earth, his

attention locked warily on the dark tom. Song met Deserve's gaze calmly.

"I haven't seen you since..." Deserve trailed off as he noticed her belly. "You're expecting kits." To Mistybreeze's amazement, warmth flickered in his eyes. "You're expecting kits. That's great! How's Boost?"

"He's well." Song replied hesitantly. Suddenly it seemed she was overwhelmed by reuniting with her brother and considering her words more carefully.

After a moment of silence, Deserve's green eyes narrowed at Stripednose. "Who is this?"

Song moved closer to the tortoiseshell tom. "This is Stripednose, my mate."

Deserve's tail twitched with agitation. "You took a Clan cat as your mate? After all they've done?"

Suddenly, Song's blue eyes flared with anger. "Enough of that!" She hissed.

Mistybreeze's heart pounded anxiously. *I didn't think she'd yell at him! Great StarClan, he's going to kill her!* Beside her, Swiftstalker looked just as nervous. No cat spoke to Deserve like that.

"Don't think I don't know your cats have been attacking us." Song glared at Deserve. "I would never forget the scent of my brother. What do you have against the Clans? They took us in!"

Deserve didn't move, but a growl rumbled in his throat. "No, they hurt us! Have you forgotten what Snakekit and his littermates did to us? We were just kits!"

"Snakekit was just a kit, too!" Song shot back. "And you killed him."

Not far from her, Mistybreeze saw Blackstorm's tail swish back and forth uncomfortably. He had been Snakekit's brother, one of the kits to bully Deserve.

Deserve's tail was lashing now, the anger clearly growing between the two siblings. "I did it for you and Boost!" He spat. "I wanted to protect you!"

"Well, you didn't!" Song growled. "You just made the Clan suspicious of us for moons and left us knowing that our brother was a murderer!"

The two cats stood facing each other, bristling angrily. The clearing was silent as every cat, soldier and Clan, stood watching, wondering if the siblings would launch into battle. Beside Song, Stripednose was crouched slightly, ready to lunge for Deserve if he had to.

Suddenly, Song's eyes softened as she realized anger would get them nowhere. "Come on, Deserve." She murmured. "I know you don't really want to hurt anyone. I just want my brother back. The one who played with us in the barn and wanted the best for us... Remember that?" Her eyes shone with nostalgia. "Please don't hurt anyone. This isn't you."

Deserve stared back at her thoughtfully. Mistybreeze wondered if he was truly remembering the happiness of his kithood. Was he wondering if he could have those feelings again? A dim light of hope flickered in her chest. *Can Song really help Deserve find peace, for himself and the Clans?*

But after a few heartbeats, Deserve's eyes returned to slits of emerald. "I will not stop until the forest runs with the blood of Clan cats." He growled lowly. "The Clans will be destroyed, one cat at a time..." His attention flashed to Blackstorm. "Starting with him."

Blackstorm's fur bristled. "What-"

To Mistybreeze's horror, Papercut and Bonfire sank their teeth into Blackstorm's pelt. The black warrior yowled and struggled as they dragged him to Deserve's paws. The white pawed tom pinned Blackstorm onto his back, raised his claws, and slashed his throat open.

No! Mistybreeze froze as Blackstorm's screech of agony split the air. Beside her, Swiftstalker had raised one paw, his blue eyes round

with shock. No cat spoke for a moment as the Army leader stood glaring down at Blackstorm's body, his white paw soaked in blood.

"Why did you kill him..?" Spiderfang echoed the thoughts of many cats. "He was loyal to you!"

"*I* was never loyal to *him."* Deserve kicked the body roughly with a hind paw. "He's with his rotten littermates now. He's the first of many cats who will feel my claws before the battle." He narrowed his eyes. "Warriors, apprentices, kits... And you can't stop me, Song."

As Stripednose yowled and launched himself at Deserve, Mistybreeze knew this couldn't end well. They had to do something, and she had an idea. She gave Swiftstalker a sharp nudge, and he stumbled. "Come on!" She hissed, and while every cat was staring at Deserve as he attacked Stripednose, they slipped away into the bushes.

Mistybreeze felt safer outside the camp. Swiftstalker looked at her anxiously. "Stripednose needs help-"

"The Clans need help!" She protested, her eyes round with distress. "These cats will attack the Clans soon if we don't do something."

"But what can we do?" Swiftstalker demanded.

"Almost all the Clan allies are here," Mistybreeze pointed out. "Only Poisonedsap is left in ShadowClan right now. If we hurry, we can return to camp and tell Depthstar what's going on."

The black and white tom nodded slowly. "Okay, but-"

"Cats of Deserve's Army!" Deserve's yowl came from within the camp. "The time has never been more right! We will attack the Clans tonight under a full moon while they are gathered at fourtrees!"

What?! Mistybreeze's blood turned to ice. She exchanged a horrified look with Swiftstalker. *We're too late!*

"Half of us will launch an attack at Fourtrees." Deserve went on angrily. "Smaller groups will be sent to each camp. Most of the cats

will be at Fourtrees, so picking off the few cats in the camps will be easy. Tonight, we will have vengeance on the Clans who have wronged us. Fight for everything they have ever taken from you! Fight like you've never fought before!"

"Death to the Clans! Death to the Clans!"

Mistybreeze trembled a little. "Swiftstalker, what do we do?"

Her friend looked just as frightened. "Is there enough time to warn the Clans?"

A cat crashed through the bushes, and Mistybreeze spun, her claws flashing out and fur bristling as she prepared to fight the soldier who had found them. But a familiar red tabby faced them, his expression filled with horror. "Bloodfur!" She relaxed a little. "I thought you were one of Deserve's cats!"

"He *is."* Swiftstalker pointed out, eyeing him uncertainly.

"No!" Bloodfur's eyes narrowed. "I'm a Clan cat through and through. There's no way I'm standing by while innocent cats are killed." He looked from Swiftstalker to Mistybreeze. "What are you two doing here?"

Swiftstalker glanced at Mistybreeze. "Can we trust him?"

She no longer had a doubt in her mind. "It's Bloodfur." Warmth filled her chest as she gazed at him. "Of course we can."

"You're right." The black and white tom agreed. "Okay." He glanced around to make sure no one was spying on them. "We need to do something to stop the attack. Deserve will destroy the Clans."

"Wait..." Bloodfur looked confused. "I thought you were on his side? You've been plotting with them since you were apprenticed!"

Swiftstalker dropped his gaze. "Not voluntarily."

"What do you mean?"

Mistybreeze listened as Swiftstalker explained to Bloodfur how

Poisonedsap had killed Maplefur, and had threatened to kill every cat in the nursery if he told anyone.

"Deserve wanted her to recruit as many clan cats as possible." Swiftstalker went on. "Poisonedsap felt that *making* them was a better option. That's why she tricked Maplefur and Cougarfoot into having her kits. She wanted to have as many as possible to join us in the battle against the Clans."

Mistybreeze nodded, wide eyed. "That must be why Revengeheart wanted me to have kits so badly."

"Exactly." Swiftstalker then looked at Bloodfur sadly. "I'm so sorry I stopped talking to you. I never wanted to stop being your friend. But Poisonedsap didn't want me anywhere near you. I was afraid she'd kill you or something."

Bloodfur's eyes were filled with sympathy and regret. "I had no idea what you were going through. I'm sorry too." He leaned forward and licked Swiftstalker's ear. "I forgive you."

Mistybreeze felt warmth ease her nerves as she saw that their friendship had been mended. She knew how much Bloodfur and Swiftstalker needed each other.

"Let's go!" She heard a soldier yowl in the distance, and the warmth faded in a heartbeat. Deserve's cats were headed for the forest.

"I hate to ruin the moment," Mistybreeze meowed uneasily. "But we need to figure out what to do, and fast. Deserve has enough supporters to destroy the Clans!"

Bloodfur's eyes darted as he thought. "The three of us can't stop the army. We need to warn the Clans."

"But how?" Mistybreeze stared at him. "We'll never make it on time!"

Swiftstalker stood, his blue eyes filled with determination. "We have to try," He growled. "I won't let any more cats die because of my mother." He scanned their surroundings. "We can take a different route back to the forest. It might be longer, but it's our only shot."

"We can't throw away our shot," Bloodfur murmured. "We have to try as hard as we can to get to Fourtrees before Deserve and his cats do."

"Right." Mistybreeze felt determination flood through her veins. "Let's go."

As the sun began setting behind the trees, Mistybreeze sprinted through the forest alongside Bloodfur and Swiftstalker. Her heart pounded with anxiety and exhaustion as she tore over the landscape, the wind rushing against her body. She was frightened. *What if we're too late? What if we're caught?*

But along with that fear was a fierce determination. She thought of Dewstorm, who had nearly been killed by Deserve's cats. Her brother, Coldpebble, who was in danger. Her dear mother, Diamondrain. Brownstripe, Rosebreeze, Milkblaze, Cardinalpaw, Maplefur, Flintpaw. So many cats who could still be alive if not for Poisonedsap and Deserve. *This is for them.* Mistybreeze thought. *This is for all the Clans!*

By the time the three of them reached the hill overlooking Fourtrees, it was dark. A full moon hung in the sky, and the gathering had begun. Mistybreeze stared down at the five Clans who had no idea Deserve and his soldiers were coming. "We're too late." She moaned. "We'll never get down there on time! Deserve's cats could arrive at any moment!"

"No, it's not too late." Bloodfur sounded determined. "I have to get down there and warn the leaders, or more innocent cats will die." He turned to them. "You two should go send word to the cats in their camps."

Mistybreeze looked at him in alarm. "Depthstar told the other Clans about you at the last gathering. If they see you, they might kill you on sight."

"I'm willing to take the risk," Bloodfur said quietly, staring down at the cats below. "I have to do something right for once. And if they don't let me, at least I'll die trying."

Though Mistybreeze admired his bravery, she was terrified of losing him. She opened her jaws to object, but Swiftstalker raised his tail. "Let him." He said quietly and stared at him. "Good luck, Bloodfur." He started to hurry away. "Mistybreeze, let's go, we need to get to the camps quickly."

Mistybreeze longed to stay with Bloodfur and help him do this. But she knew Swiftstalker was right. Some cat needed to warn the camps. "Okay." She cast Bloodfur a look, and with no time to think about it, she leaned in and licked his cheek. "I love you."

Not waiting for a response, she turned and ran after Swiftstalker toward ShadowClan territory.

"I'll head to ShadowClan," Swiftstalker panted, still exhausted from their race to the forest. "You go to WindClan."

Mistybreeze nodded, but found her pace slowing. While Swiftstalker continued onward and disappeared through the trees, she looked over her shoulder. *I can't let Bloodfur do this alone... What if he's attacked?* She hesitated, looking toward the moor. I'll go to WindClan after. I have to be there for Bloodfur.

She turned and retraced her steps in a run. When she reached the hill and peered down at Fourtrees, she froze when she saw Bloodfur on the Great Rock with the leaders. Depthstar and Frostedstar had him pinned between them, snarling down at him angrily.

No! Terrified the leaders would kill him, Mistybreeze took off down the slope and into the throng of cats, who were alarmed by Bloodfur's appearance.

"I can't believe that mouse brain would show his face here!" Timberstorm exclaimed, fur bristling.

"I heard he killed an apprentice!" Darkminnow of RiverClan was whispering to Risingmoon.

Cliffshade snarled. "Kill him, Depthstar!"

Mistybreeze pushed her way through the crowd, ignoring their angry voices. As she passed Coldpebble, he blinked at her in

surprise. "Mistybreeze, what's going on?"

No time to respond, she continued weaving her way toward the Great Rock as quickly as she could. Just then, the leaders released Bloodfur, and he leaped to the edge of the rock, yowling. "Deserve's Army is going to be here at any moment! They're attacking here and at your camps! There are traitors in your Clans! You have to-"

"Deserve's Army, attack!"

Deserve's screech sounded from beyond the trees, and Mistybreeze spun, horrified to see Deserve charge from the undergrowth, green eyes glowing with anger. Behind him came the swarm of soldiers and Clan allies, claws flashing in the darkness. Bloodfur's warning had been too late, no cat was prepared.

In an instant, Fourtrees became a battlefield. Bonfire lunged for Pebblestep of RiverClan, rolling him to the ground and slashing at his ears, while Battalon tackled his own Clanmate, Morningmist, who screeched in shock.

Falconclaw leaped for Greenpine, but the tabby she-cat swung him aside with a hard blow, her green eyes blazing with bewilderment. "What are you doing?"

"Death to the Clans!" The orange tabby bared his teeth and lunged for her throat, but Cliffshade leaped to his mate's aid, fastening his teeth into the young tom's neck and throwing him to the ground.

As Crow charged toward her, Mistybreeze braced herself, unsheathing her claws. But to her surprise, the soldier whisked by, ignoring her. Spinning, she understood why. Lots of the soldiers were headed straight for the Great Rock, attempting to kill the leaders.

"Bloodfur!" She gasped, shocked to see that he was still up there, desperately trying to fend off the rogues as they came. As Strawberrystar slashed at Timber's shoulder, the brown soldier staggered and slammed into Bloodfur, knocking him clear off the Great Rock.

Mistybreeze sprinted forward, leaping clear over two grappling cats and slid into the way of Bloodfur's descent. She successfully broke his fall as he slumped onto her back, then rolled off of her, looking startled. "What are you doing here?" He gasped. "You were supposed to warn WindClan!"

"I know," She admitted, feeling a twinge of guilt. "But I couldn't leave you to do this alone." She looked around in dismay at the state of the battle. Cats screeched and yowled as they ripped at each others pelts. Rain had begun pattering fiercely at the ground, as though StarClan was crying in anger at the broken truce.

"Go help WindClan!" Bloodfur yowled over the pouring rain, then ran toward Cobratail, who was being pinned by a tabby soldier.

Feeling confident that Bloodfur could take care of himself, Mistybreeze started in the direction of the moor, dodging Mudslip and Marshclaw as they rolled through the mud, snarling. Wolf snapped at Heatstorm's throat. Heartsong ripped her claws through Patch's ear.

A brown spotted she-cat swung at Mistybreeze. It was Leopardthorn, one of Clovernose's kits. "What's wrong with you?" The WindClan traitor hissed. "Attack! This is what we've been trained for!"

"I would never betray the Clans!" Mistybreeze snarled before she lunged for Leopardthorn, sinking her teeth into her shoulder. The she-cat screeched and slashed her claws at her flank, but Mistybreeze bit down harder, feeling her teeth meet bone.

With a howl, Leopardthorn tore free and retreated into the crowd.

Spitting out blood, Mistybreeze spun and continued racing through the battlefield. She didn't get much further before a cat slammed into Mistybreeze, sending her rolling through the mud. She shook rain off her whiskers and found herself glaring up into the face of Revengeheart.

"I always knew you'd betray me!" Her so-called mate's eyes blazed with rage and hatred as he circled her slowly. "You haven't

contributed anything to this plan!" He spat. "I should never have wasted my time on such a pathetic, useless she-cat!"

You! Mistybreeze's eyes narrowed to slits as she watched him, returning his hateful glare. She would have liked to give him a piece of her mind, and attack him right now. But there was no time. "Get out of my way!" She hissed in his face. "I have to go to WindClan!"

"The only place you're going is StarClan!" Without warning, Revengeheart lunged at her, pinning her and piercing his teeth into her throat. Panic bolted through Mistybreeze as she yowled and pushed her paws against his chest, but she was no match for him. *This is it. I'm done.*

"No!"

To her shock, Bloodfur barrelled into Revengeheart, knocking him away from her and biting into his shoulder. As he slammed him to the wet ground, Mistybreeze scrambled to her paws, glaring at the white tom. Bloodfur can handle him. I have to get to WindClan before they're attacked!

Mistybreeze continued bolting through the clearing, her paws kicking up wet grass and mud. *To her relief, there were no more obstacles.* Her gaze fixed on the moor ahead, she pelted onward.

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Being out on the open moor, it wasn't too hard to find the WindClan camp. When she reached it, she saw that a gray tabby she-cat, Willowtail, was guarding the entrance. When she saw Mistybreeze, she stood. "What-"

"Deserve's Army!" Mistybreeze skidded to a halt, panting. "Rogues, they've attacked at the gathering, and they're coming here too!"

Willowtail looked startled and very confused. But if Mistybreeze looked as muddy and battered as she felt, the WindClan warrior had no reason to doubt her. "Come on!" She whipped around and hurried into the camp, and Mistybreeze followed.

It was quiet and calm in the WindClan camp. Howlstorm and Dandeliontail lay near the warriors den sharing a mouse, while Firetail spoke with Scorchwater. Petalflame groomed herself. It looked like the other cats who hadn't gone to the gathering were asleep. These cats didn't seem bothered by the rain.

The calm mood was changed in an instant. "WindClan! Everyone!" Willowtail raised her voice. "Everyone, wake up!"

Several cats looked up while others emerged from their dens, puzzled.

"What's going on?" Thunderjolt growled, glaring at Mistybreeze. "That's a ShadowClan cat!"

"Is ShadowClan attacking?" Featherblaze bristled.

"We are under attack!" Willowtail meowed as her Clanmates gathered around her and Mistybreeze. "But not by ShadowClan." She flashed a look at Mistybreeze. "Can you explain what's happening?"

Mistybreeze raised her voice to the WindClan cats around her. "The gathering has been attacked by Deserve's Army, a group of bloodthirsty rogues! They show no mercy and want to destroy the Clans. They're headed for the camps next!"

The WindClan cats murmured to one another anxiously.

"We need to-"

Before Mistybreeze could continue, a screech of rage sounded from behind her. She spun and saw Castiel burst through the gorse tunnel, followed by Tornadowind, Leopardthorn, and a dozen soldiers.

But the WindClan cats were prepared. With a yowl, Thunderjolt launched himself at Castiel, rolling the silver tabby to the ground. A soldier rolled through the dirt with Featherblaze, while Firetail and Soakedears batted at Tornadowind and another soldier.

With a hiss, Mistybreeze found herself fighting side by side with

Willowtail, swinging blows at Papercut and Marshclaw. The white soldier's claws sliced her nose, and she winced before throwing him to the ground, swiping her hind claws at his belly. Papercut screeched and threw her off, fleeing the duel.

"Leopardthorn! Stop!"

Mistybreeze glanced aside, surprised to see Clovernose, one of Deserve's allies, crouched facing her daughter. She was glad to see the queen had found a change of heart. "This is our Clan, our home!" She pleaded.

Leopardthorn looked wildly confused. "You brought us into this fight when we were apprentices!" She hissed. "*You* started this!"

"I was wrong about Deserve!" Clovernose wailed. "I'm sorry I led you down the wrong path, I-"

With a frustrated screech, Leopardthorn attacked her mother, and they disappeared into the crowd of battle.

Mistybreeze spotted Dewstorm outside the medicine den, pinned by a tabby soldier. "Dewstorm!" She darted across the clearing, dodging Dandeliontail as she rolled by with a ginger she-cat, and leaped onto the tabby's back, ripping up chunks of fur.

The soldier yowled and swung, trying to dislodge her, but she dug her claws into him. "Let go, let go!" He begged for mercy, and when she gave in and leaped off him, the tabby fled from the camp with his tail between his legs.

"Good work!" Dewstorm gasped, stumbling to his paws.

"What are you doing here?" Mistybreeze exclaimed, relieved he wasn't at Fourtrees.

"Darkstorm had a sore throat, so I stayed to keep an eye on him." Dewstorm explained before his eyes rested sadly on the elder, who lay dead with his throat torn open. Clearly the situation had worsened.

A yowl sounded behind Mistybreeze, and she spun to see

Honeyfrost, struggling as Castiel bit into her throat. With a yowl, she leaped at the soldier, throwing him off the she-cat.

The silver tabby staggered to his paws and glared at her. "I'm not surprised you betrayed us." He growled, lashing his striped tail. Mistybreeze bared her teeth, ready to attack him again.

But to her surprise, Castiel raised his voice. "Retreat! We have other camps to attack!" He spun and fled through the gorse tunnel. His soldiers darted after him.

"Leopardthorn! Marshclaw!" Clovernose staggered, staring at her kits pleadingly.

The two young cats glared at their mother before following the soldiers. Their allegiance remained with Deserve.

As the last of the soldiers vanished, the clearing went quiet. Several cats looked at each other, then quickly saw to the wounded.

Mistybreeze gave her pelt a shake before she stepped forward, anxiously looking down at Honeyfrost. To her dismay, the she-cat was dead. Not far from her, Clovernose pressed her muzzle into Petaltail's bloody pelt.

Willowtail shook her head sadly as she gazed across at her Clanmates. "Darkstorm is dead too." She meowed quietly.

"We will recover." Dewstorm padded forward and touched Willowtail's shoulder with his tail reassuringly. "It would have been much worse if Mistybreeze hadn't warned us." He blinked warmly at her. "You did very well. I know Diamondrain is very proud of you. You did exactly as she knew you would."

"What?" Mistybreeze blinked, while Willowtail padded away.

Dewstorm tipped his head. "Remember the message? She said you are stronger than ever now, but you don't have to fight alone. You are one of three cats whose loyalties will be proven under a full moon."

In all the chaos, Mistybreeze had forgotten her mother's words. *She*

was right! It is the night of a full moon. And Bloodfur, Swiftstalker, and I are proving our loyalties to the Clans. Her heart swelled. *Does that mean we're going to win this battle? That the Clans will survive?*

With a purr, Mistybreeze bumped her forehead against her uncle's cheek. "Thank you. But the battle isn't over yet." She turned and saw that Willowtail was standing in the gorse tunnel now. She hurried over to her. "Willowtail, I-"

She broke off, her heart leaping when she saw who Willowtail was speaking to. "Bloodfur!" *He's okay!* To her surprise and confusion, two of Poisonedsap's kits were at his paws, Gingerkit and Duskkit. But she pushed her questions aside. Overwhelmed with relief, she pushed forward.

"Mistybreeze!" He purred as they touched noses. "You made it!"

She stepped back and nodded, purring loudly. She had never been so happy to see Bloodfur and his warm yellow eyes. "I got here just before the rogues came. They were prepared for the attack."

Bloodfur's eyes shone. "I knew you could do it." He looked around. "I wonder how the other clans are..."

"Gladestar hasn't returned," Willowtail commented uneasily. "Or Monarchwing."

"They must still be at fourtrees," Mistybreeze looked to Bloodfur anxiously. "The other leaders too. We have to help them!"

"Right." Bloodfur started to turn away, then paused. "So you'll take the kits?" He asked Willowtail.

"Of course," Willowtail meowed, pulling them close to her. "They'll be safe in WindClan."

Bloodfur caught Mistybreeze's eye and gave her a nod. The two of them began racing off in the direction of Fourtrees.

As Mistybreeze pelted over the moor, her body ached from running and fighting. And yet she had never felt better. She felt free. At last she was fighting for the Clans, against the cats who had treated her

so terribly, the cats who had killed her Clanmates. Glancing beside her at Bloodfur, she guessed that he was feeling similar.

I don't know how this battle will end. But I know the Clans will survive. I'm going to live as a regular loyal ShadowClan warrior! I'll spend time with Coldpebble and Swiftstalker, any cat I like without fear of Revengeheart. And... She gazed at the cat racing alongside her. *I'm going to start a life with Bloodfur.*

And this time, she was confident in her choice.

THE END